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John Webster's Dramaturgy.

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John Webster's Dramaturgy

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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ABSTRACT

In recent years there have been many studies of the works, especially of the two major tragedies, of John Webster. None of these studies, however, has dealt exclusively with Webster's dramaturgy, which has often been considered slovenly. This study of the dramaturgy of the plays that Webster wrote independent of collaborators attempts to show that Webster constructed his plays along the lines of dramaturgy used by Renaissance dramatists and that his plays are, according to Renaissance tastes and premises, dramaturgically sound.

The first chapter is devoted to previous Webster criticism, concentrating on the dramaturgy and on discussions of Webster's purpose. Not all the criticism is, of course, adverse; but many Webster critics feel that the dramaturgy is inept, thus obscuring the central purpose of the plays. For example, several writers consider the last act of The Duchess of Malfi, at best, an anti-climax, at worst, entirely superfluous. Others find the papal election scene in The White Devil to be non-functional. Many critics feel that some characters lack motivation and that some characters are grotesque monsters, entirely devoid of any humanizing quality.

In the second chapter a study of Renaissance dramatic technique is made. Most Renaissance playwrights did little theorizing; they simply wrote plays. They generally followed a pyramidal structure of exposition, exciting force, rising action, turning point, falling action and denouement. Many dramatists were aware of classical principles, but few
utilized these principles. A workable technique of comedy was often much like that of tragedy, the difference being that after the turning point, the climax is happy rather than tragic.

Each of the following three chapters presents a detailed study of one of Webster's plays, The White Devil, The Duchess of Malfi and The Devil's Law-Case. How Webster worked from his sources in the handling of plot and characterization is considered. In addition there is a detailed scene by scene explication of each play. It is found that Webster's dramatic method is generally in accord with Renaissance dramatic principles as described in the second chapter. His characters are generally well motivated and, on Renaissance terms, psychologically credible; they are functional as well. But, as did other dramatists of the period, Webster concentrated on scenes. This writing of the big scene tended to weaken the overall structure and effect. Although there are some weaknesses in Webster's plays because of this emphasis on scenes and because of the usual carelessness and inattention of Renaissance playwrights, Webster's plays are generally sound dramaturgically. They present a somber view of the world, emphasizing the theme of appearance as opposed to reality. In the world of Webster's plays, both people and actions are often different from their outward appearances; especially is this difference to be found in women and in courts.

A sixth chapter offers some comments on two of the collaborations, A Cure For a Cuckold and Appius and Virginia. In this chapter an attempt is made to show that the dramaturgy
of a play by more than one dramatist is often likely to be
more haphazard than that of a play by a single author because
of the method of composition of the collaborators.
I. INTRODUCTION: PREVIOUS CRITICISM

In the past twenty-five years there have been seven books dealing entirely with John Webster and his works, at least twice that number of doctoral dissertations in American universities, well over a hundred scholarly articles on various aspects of Webster's work, and a great number of studies that are parts of books on Renaissance literature, on Renaissance drama, or on some particular aspect of Renaissance writing. There are even a few notes (God save the mark!) on Webster's life, about which nothing is known. (Such notes are usually of a rather negative nature, explaining clearly who John Webster was not.) Finally, there have been a dozen or more editions of Webster's two great tragedies.

What, then, can still another study of the Webster plays add? Have not the bones of the plays been picked clean of scholarly carrion? Were these plays dead things, the answer might be affirmative; but because the drama of the English Renaissance is a living thing, not carrion, the answer is no. And the quantity of research on Webster in recent years indicates, not that his works have been thoroughly and finally analyzed, but that there is little consensus on them and that new light can still be shed.

That the playwrights of the Renaissance have a drama­turgic method has been shown by many scholars.1 There is

1 See Chapter II.
little contemporary comment on the method of constructing a play, but the general pattern of this method has been deduced from the plays. In this study, I shall outline this dramaturgic method and attempt to show that it is, by and large, the method that Webster followed. He implies a familiarity with the classical rules in his preface to *The White Devil* and admits that these are not the rules he chose to follow, albeit implying, at the same time, some regret in writing for an audience that would not accept a play written in the classical manner. To the reader of the play he says,

> If it be objected this is no true Drammaticke Poem, I shall easily confesse it,... willingly, and not ignorantly, in this kind have I faulted: for should a man present to such an Auditory the most sententious Tragedy that ever was written observing all the criticall lawes, as heighth of stile; and gravety of person; inrich it with the sententious Chorus, and as it were life'n Death, in the passionate and weighty Nuntius: yet after all this divine rapture,..., the breath that comes from the uncapable multitude, is able to poison it,...\(^2\)

And in his words "To the Juditious Reader" prefaced to *The Devil's Law-Case*, Webster again pleads that the play contains none of "...those vices, which proceed from ignorance."\(^3\)

Further, he adds, "A great part of the grace of this (I confesse) lay in Action."\(^4\) Webster wrote for the theater and knew what must be done to make a play successful on the stage, though apparently *The White Devil* was something less

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\(^3\) Ibid., II, 236.

\(^4\) Ibid.
than a roaring success when performed at the Red Bull in 1611-1612.  

Yet one of the chief criticisms of Webster has been his ineffective dramaturgy. There would be little benefit in attempting to give a complete review of Webster criticism here, for such a study has already been done in a thorough and scholarly book by Don D. Moore. But an examination of some of the critical attitudes germane to this study is appropriate at this point.

Some critics of the early nineteenth century attack the dramaturgy of the plays. The last act of The Duchess of Malfi is said to be weak; Webster's handling of character is criticized as inconsistent, and the plots of the plays are often attacked as being ill-conceived. It might be noted that a century later the same aspects of the plays are still being attacked and defended or explained. In 1927 Peter Haworth observes that

The critic of Webster has to put forward and apology with every work he examines. Vittoria Corombona, in

5 Webster says in the preface "To the Reader" (The White Devil) that "...since it was acted in so dull a time of Winter, presented in so open and blacke a Theater, that it wanted (that which is the onely grace and setting out of a Tragedy) a full and understanding Auditory: and that since that time I have noted, most of the people that come to that Playhouse, resemble those ignorant asses (who visiting Stationers shoppes their use is not to inquire for good bookes, but new bookes) I present it to the generall view with confidence." (Ibid., I, 107)

6 Don D. Moore, John Webster and His Critics, 1617-1964 (Baton Rouge, 1966). I am indebted to this work for some of the material that follows.

7 Ibid., Chapt 2, passim.
spite of the author's assurance, has grave defects in its characterization and construction. The last act of The Duchess of Malfi is a very indifferent tag to a wonderful conception. Appius and Virginia, if Webster had any hand in it, improves in symmetry and simplicity of plot, but there is a consequent absence of subtlety in the characterization, and a baldness and tenuity in treatment that prevent our unqualified praise, and indeed led Rupert Brooke to question Webster's authorship. The Devil's Law-Case is a total failure as a work of art.8

In criticism, plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

Other early nineteenth century critics do not submit the plays to analysis. Such men as Lamb and Hazlitt, poets themselves, are appreciators of poetry, and "...in place of penetrating analysis and inquiry into the causes of intensity, undertook to show the reader the aesthetic effect of John Webster on their own minds."9

Attacks on the poor plotting and weak characterization of the Webster plays continue in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Often the Victorian sensibility of the critic is shocked; often the play offends because Renaissance drama does not conform to the construction of the pièce bien faite of the period. Two examples of these types of criticism are found in George Henry Lewes10 and in Charles Kingsley.11 Lewes, attending the Horne Production of The Duchess of Malfi

9 Moore, p. 31.
at Sadler's Wells in 1850, finds that Horne's editing helps, but not enough; it is still, to him, a bad play, presenting, he says, "...a motiveless and false exhibition of human nature.... This is not the work of a dramatist; it is clumsy ignorance."¹² The Duchess of Malfi becomes one of the correctives of his youthful error of liking Elizabethan drama. Charles Kingsley objects to Webster's lack of moral purpose and to the static characters of the plays. Concerning characters he says that they evidence no development, that they are described as being better than they really are and that they are not characterized by action but by description.

Two editors of Webster in the nineteenth century are the Reverend Alexander Dyce¹³ and John Addington Symonds.¹⁴ Most of the introduction to the Dyce edition is devoted to questions of biography, but there are a few comments on notable scenes and characters. The implication of the Dyce introduction is that Dyce held a view similar to that of Symonds, expressed in the latter's introduction to the Mermaid Edition, that Webster is at his best in creating dramatic situations, but that he is weak in making plots and characters.

¹² Lewes, pp. 120-121.


Something of a return to the Lamb and Hazlitt type of criticism comes with Swinburne. Though he rates Webster second to Shakespeare, he bases his rating largely on the quality of the poetry. He is not so enthusiastic about Webster's dramaturgy. For example, he calls *The Devil's Law-Case* "incompetent," "insufficient," "incoherent" and "chaotic." The plot, he says, is "absurd," "preposterous." Swinburne is, to Swinburne, no better than a workmanlike job, lacking the splendid poetry and the consistency of character of Webster's two great tragedies. He does, however, imply that Webster has some dramaturgic ability when he praises Webster's turning the obnoxious people of the sources of the great tragedies into living, vital characters, often capable of great courage. Finally, Swinburne defends the necessity of the fifth act of *The Duchess of Malfi* as a conclusion to the theme of chance, a dominant theme in Webster according to him.

A production of *The Duchess of Malfi* in 1891 received mixed reviews and, more important, provoked attacks by William Archer and Bernard Shaw. Both of these men were totally out of sympathy with Renaissance drama, seeing good only in the realistic theater of Ibsen. To them, this was a barbarous play written for a barbarous age. Archer's view

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16 Ibid., pp. 25-26.

17 Moore, pp. 58-63.
of Webster will be considered in more detail later, for Archer was not yet finished.

So the nineteenth century closes with attacks by the realists on Webster, attacks which saw nothing good in the plays. Moore sums up nineteenth century Webster criticism by pointing out that there are three overlapping views of the dramatist. The greatest enthusiasts of that century emphasize Webster's skill in creating an effective poetic vision. The more tepid admirers point out his ability to create occasional great scenes, especially scenes of horror. These critics find Webster a great artist marred by such serious imperfections as the inability to create consistent, well developed characters and the failure to make clear his total meaning. Finally, the total realists find in Webster nothing more than a hopelessly bad playwright. Moore concludes:

"Thus we may derive the nineteenth-century composite of John Webster, Jacobean dramatist: he was genius, but a very imperfect one. Many of his dramatic flashes are comparable only to Shakespeare, and his scenes of terror are the greatest known; but he is a dramatist of great lines and occasional scenes only. He understood human nature, but often a sense of character failed him. There is a defiant courage displayed by the Duchess and Vittoria, but there is certainly no moral purpose in his plays and no totality of tragic vision. Act IV of The Duchess of Malfi is one of the greatest acts ever written; it is absurd that Act V was written at all."

In the present century Webster criticism is often both more analytical and more sophisticated, but some twentieth century criticism continues one of the dominant ideas of

18 Ibid., p. 68.
19 Ibid., pp. 68-9.
earlier days. Brander Matthews, for example, claims that any literary form which becomes popular attracts those who have no talent for the form but who want to cash in on the popularity; hence, he says, "Chapman, for one, had no natural bent toward the theater, and Webster, for another, for all his striving after the horrible, does not prove his possession of the native endowment of the instinctive playwright. Chapman and Webster were poets, beyond all question; but they were not born playwrights."20 Webster is a poet, able to make an occasional scene, but unable to handle a plot; so goes much of the Webster criticism. The criticism of William Morris21 presents this view. Morris says that neither Swinburne's blind adulation nor William Watson's equally blind condemnation will do. Though he likes much of the poetry, he says that the plots are uncertain and contain too many characters and incidents. Generally, however, Morris is an admirer of Webster, placing Webster second to Shakespeare as does C. E. Vaughan.22 And Vaughan too criticizes Webster's awkward handling of plot.23

22 C. E. Vaughan, "Tourner and Webster," CHEL, VI (New York, 1910), 188-211.
23 Moore points out several other critics of this time who share the view that Webster was at times a great poet, but was a maker of poorly constructed plays. Among these are Chambers (Cyclopedia of English Literature, 1902), Seccombe and Allen (The Age of Shakespeare, 1903), and W. J. Courthorpe (History of English Poetry, v. 4, 1903).
In addition to the continuation of earlier ideas into this century there is some new scholarship. A 1900 essay by W. W. Greg offers a study of Webster's sources of and an analysis of the construction of The White Devil.\textsuperscript{24} In the first part of his essay, Greg compares the characters in the play to those in the sources,\textsuperscript{25} commenting favorably on the changes Webster made. These changes, which will be discussed in Chapter III, are dramaturgic; hence Greg's approval of them implies a vote in favor of Webster's skill as a dramatist.\textsuperscript{26}

Another new approach is taken to the unity of a Webster play by C. V. Boyer,\textsuperscript{27} who feels that in The Duchess of Malfi the tragedy is of the brothers and of Bosola, not of the Duchess. According to Boyer she has no tragic flaw, no guilt whatsoever. Of this view Moore says, "In this study of Bosola and the moral unity of the tragedy, with the emphasis taken from the Duchess, Boyer's 1914 writing bears a definite kinship with the critical accounts of the 1940's


\textsuperscript{25} There are numerous later comparisons. The authoritative one now is Gunnar Boklund, The Sources of The White Devil (Uppsala, 1957).

\textsuperscript{26} Other writers who have made similar comparisons, implying Webster's skill as a dramatist, are Boklund; Vaughan; E. E. Stoll, John Webster (Boston, 1905); Lucas; and John Russell Brown, ed., The White Devil, The Revels Plays (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).

\textsuperscript{27} Clarence Valentine Boyer, The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy (London, 1914).
Many students of Webster, including Lucas and Moore, consider Rupert Brooke's study of Webster among the best. Brooke is predisposed toward tragedy; comedies and histories he feels to be degenerate forms of drama. And Webster's two great tragedies are to him among the best. But even Brooke has little good to say about Webster's dramaturgy: he says that Webster does not really recognize plot in the usual sense of the word, that Webster is too atmospheric. Brooke is impressed by the poetry and by the satire, but conventions of the Renaissance theater such as the soliloquy and the aside he thinks Webster handles badly. The best he can manage about Webster's ability at making a play is, "Theatrically, though he is competent and sometimes powerful, he exhibits no vastly unusual ability."\

In 1923 William Archer, the man of the realistic theater, again turns his attention to the Renaissance drama and to Webster. A production of The Duchess of Malfi prompts his diatribe. He finds the play almost entirely void of motivation. The part of Bosola "... is a glaring example of constructive inefficiency." There should be

28 Moore, p. 86.


30 Ibid., p. 127.

31 William Archer, The Old Drama and the New (Boston, 1923), pp. 52-62, et passim.

32 Ibid., p. 55.
no such character in the play; Webster should have let
rumors reach the brothers, then have had them send a spy
who would discover the truth and precipitate the revenge.
Of the dead hand business in Act IV, Archer says,

Is the invention of this ghastly practical joke...a
thing to be admired, to earn its inventor a place
only a little below Sophocles and Shakespeare? I
suggest that any morbid-minded school boy could have
conceived it, and that the humblest melodramatist
of today would not dare to affront his transpontine
audiences by asking them to applaud such a grisly
absurdity.33

Later in the book Archer fires a parting shot at Webster:

I have tried to show that the construction of Webster's
The Duchess of Malfi is hopelessly loose, shambling
and maladroit, and that the horrors that he is supposed
to "touch" so "skilfully" are frigid and mechanical
inventions, within the range of the humblest capacity.34

That there are flaws in Webster cannot be denied; that
he is as bad as Archer says is incredible.

The adverse criticism of Webster's ability as a dramatic
artist continues, though perhaps it is not quite so harsh
as Archer's. Haworth, mentioned earlier, has this to say
in his chapters on Webster:

We do not look for sustained excellence in drama, but
Webster does not even manage the indispensable sequence
and organic evolution. His moral purpose accounts for
the arbitrary nature of the nemesis in his plays, and
amounts to a fundamental defect in his dramatic art.
His fantastic interference with the natural evolution
of characters and plot for the purpose of fashioning
a penalty appropriate to the crime, illustrated below
in all the plays, is inferior to Shakesperian art,

33 Ibid., p. 57.
34 Ibid., p. 76
which sacrifices an Ophelia or a Cordelia in the consummate regard for artistic truth.... The prevailing form of expression among the Elizabethan poets was drama, and many writers gave their work this form who were unequal to the mechanical and technical demands upon an accomplished playwright. Webster was pre-eminently a scholar with supreme gifts of purely literary quality, and these alone will not produce the greatest drama. 35

This appraisal of Webster's dramatic worth not only looks back to the idea of the poet who could not write a play, but also looks ahead to more recent studies which emphasize the unity of moral tone in the plays, or the lack of a moral foundation in them.

To this point in the history of Webster criticism, there has been no thorough defense of Webster's dramaturgy, but in 1927 the definitive edition of the works edited by F. L. Lucas appears. In the introduction to this edition, Lucas gives what probably is still the best defense of Webster as a playwright, and this defense makes no attempt to explain away the obvious flaws that mar the plays. First, Lucas points out that the audiences wanted a series of great scenes, not a well-made play. "And so all their playwrights, Shakespeare included, worked predominantly in scenes. Scenes were the essential units. That is the first thing to realize about their plays." 36 This fact, Lucas points out, accounts for the possibility of collaborations and for the ability of some critics to excerpt great scenes from the contexts of the plays. The audiences simply did not notice consistency:

35 Haworth, p. 79.
36 Lucas, I, 17.
hence this method of building by scenes could be effective.
Lucas goes on to comment specifically on Webster's drama-
turgy. After noting Archer's attack, he says:

For it is, I think, quite possible to underrate even
his stage-craft until we learn to look at his tragedies
as his audience saw them—less as wholes than as a
series of great situations. Webster cannot give his
plays a close-knit logical unity; he is often child-
ishly irrelevant; and his characters are sometimes
wildly inconsistent from scene to scene. That was
the fashion of his day. But his work remains more
than a mere chaos of dramatic fragments, and he is a
highly successful playwright in his own Gothic style.37

There are two other aspects of Webster's dramatic art that
Lucas praises. One is the dramatist's ability to create in
a moment the proper tone for a scene. It is an ability
related to his often noted poetic talent.

Sudden flashes and sullen atmosphere—the two gifts
are not unconnected. In either case it is a question
of the single deft touch which goes home, the spare
brevity which makes the hearer think more, the less
he hears—in a word, economy. This is a quality in
Webster to which Justice has not been done. While
his too obvious horrors have been overpraised, his
subtlety, his power of suggestion have been
forgotten.38

The other aspect is Webster's characterizations. Lucas
points out that although there are no Hamlets or Falstiffs
who seem to live outside the confines of the plays, the
characters of Webster "...are adequate to the part they play,
and no more than that."39 Generally, they are depicted
broadly, but there is an occasional fine touch.

37 Ibid., p. 21.
38 Ibid., p. 25.
39 Ibid., p. 27.
Although it would be pleasing to the Webster aficionado to stop with the words of Lucas, there is more to be said; for the criticism continues. One vein follows the now traditional view of Webster the playwright. This view is summed up in 1947 by Moody E. Prior, who agrees with the Webster adherents that Webster had a gift for figurative language and made good dialogue of it, but who thinks that Webster might have avoided some of the illogicalities of the plays.\textsuperscript{40} Says Prior of the construction of the Webster plays, Principally, he has been accused of failing to preserve logical connections between episodes and to follow incidents to their proper consequences, of destroying concentration by spinning out his play after the Duchess's death, of substituting physical horrors for tragic fear and of failing to make the behavior of his principal characters clear and consistent. On this last point, Lucas has called attention to Italian Renaissance customs and social codes to lend plausibility to the conduct of the characters, but if Webster himself fails to make clear this basis of understanding and consistency, if only by implication, the play may still be regarded as slightly imperfect in the respect that it does not clearly or consistently enough construct its own special world.\textsuperscript{41}

But, Prior continues, though the dramatic construction is loose, the imagery is well organized and meaningful, for there is much harmony and consistency in the diction and imagery.\textsuperscript{42} He is explaining, perhaps with better effect than earlier commentators, that Webster is a splendid poet who cannot construct a play. Prior, however, adds the conception

\textsuperscript{40} Moody E. Prior, \textit{The Language of Tragedy} (New York, 1947), pp. 120-121.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 121.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., pp. 122-132.
that the language gives the works their unity.\(^4^3\)

The idea of a unity of tone or purpose or lack of purpose in the Webster tragedies has become an important one for recent critics. W. A. Edwards\(^4^4\) attacks not only Webster's dramaturgy but also his lack of moral purpose. Of the dramaturgy, Edwards says Webster cannot plot competently. Furthermore, he feels that the poet Webster is overrated, that he cannot handle a sustained passage of verse; but, despite this fact, Webster concentrates on fantastic imagery. He is more interested in words than in appropriateness to character or progression of the drama.

"Webster's commonplace-book," Edwards writes, "must have been packed with sentences, images and anecdotes, but when it comes to introducing them into the right dramatic situation he is often a bungler, and tends to make the situation for the sake of his image or essay."\(^4^5\) Finally, Edwards attacks the lack of moral purpose in the tragedies. In the rotten world of the Webster tragedies, he says, there is nothing good by which the depravity can be measured. The characters are sub-moral, apparently un-thinking; they

\(^4^3\) The difficulty of such a view as this one is pointed out by Muriel C. Bradbrook who, in commenting on Webster's style and sardonic tone says, "...a unity which is only a unity of tone and temper is likely to be precarious and unstable, since it is founded on eclecticism, and dependent on continuity of mood alone." M. C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (Cambridge, England, 1935), p. 212.


\(^4^5\) Ibid., p. 164.
have no foresight, no scruples, no doubts or fears, no remorse and never gain insight into themselves; there are no good comments on life. It's a world in which "...things just happen in the general mist of error, events are not within control nor are human desires; let's snatch what comes and clutch it, fight our way out of tight corners, and meet the end without squealing."46

A similar but even stronger attack follows from the same source, Scrutiny.47 Ian Jack says that the violence of Webster shows only a crumbling of the theological scheme. Great tragedy, he says, reflects a great mind. Webster's plays show a mind that never achieved "a profound and balanced insight into life."48 The sententiae, showing a stoical and Senecan philosophy, appear to Jack to be later interpolations. He comments, "There is no correspondence between the axioms and the life represented in the drama. This is the fundamental flaw in Webster."49 According to Jack, Webster saw no moral order as real; no positive philosophy moved him. His inspiration was negative. The only unity of the plays is disorder, symbolized by the mist. Working in the revenge tradition instead of in the morality tradition severely limited him but was appropriate to his mind. Machiavelianism

46 Ibid., p. 177. The subject of the quotation is Webster not Hemingway.

47 Edwards' essay appeared originally in Scrutiny in 1933. Moore refers to Edwards, Jack, Boris Ford and L. G. Salinger (See note 53) as being of the critical school of F. R. Leavis.


49 Ibid., 39.
appealed to Webster's "unbalanced" mind, and it usurped the place of order and degree, things found in the mind of a more "conservative" poet.\textsuperscript{50} Jack finds Webster's characters to be sub-human monsters whose only virtue is courage. Because the dishonorable Vittoria appears honorable, we have the same sort of "artistic insincerity" that we have in the moral maxims, "a lie in the poet's heart."\textsuperscript{51} Shakespeare, he adds rather gratuitously, would never be guilty of this. The atmosphere of the tragedies, Jack observes, is a corrupt court, but there is no melioration at the end. He finds the suggestions of a better world insincere; for if the evil is removed from Webster's world, nothing is left. He objects to the inconsistencies of the plays because there is no moral purpose to which they are subservient. Terror and horror are the only purpose; Webster is a decadent.\textsuperscript{52}

The criticism of L. G. Salingar adds little to that of Edwards and Jack. He, too, sees Webster as a sophisticated decadent whose world lacks moral order and values.\textsuperscript{53}

Others outside of the Leavis school continue remarking on the lack of a moral view in Webster. In his section on

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 39-40.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 41. Might we say of Webster, "In his heart he knows he's wrong"?

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 42-43.

M. C. Bradbrook and Una Ellis-Fermor, Moore says that the general view of these two is of Webster's non-moral world, a world lacking the moral unity in which good prevails. Bradbrook also says of the dramaturgy that Webster "...was concerned with perfection of detail rather than design; this is reflected in his structure as well as the texture of his verse." Ellis-Fermor sees Webster's world as one shrouded by a mist, "...the final horror, the symbol of ignorance, the infinite empty space in which man hovers, the material and spiritual world both in different terms unreal." The conflict between the "deep pit of darkness" and the "stars" that "shine still" remains, she says, unresolved in Webster. Although she feels that the action of the plays is often obscure, she says that Webster has "a fine sense of the theater" and a "sure sense of drama."

Another critic who holds the view that Webster's world is a non-moral one is Clifford Leech, though he has much more to say about the actual dramaturgy. Leech identifies many of the structural defects in the plays beginning with The Duchess of Malfi. In this play the last act, he says, is an anti-climax; Antonio expresses varying attitudes

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54 Moore, p. 122.
55 Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions, p. 186.
57 Ibid., p. 175.
toward Bosola within fifty lines of the first scene; the patience of Ferdinand in waiting two years to act after receiving news of his sister's first child is improbable; the horoscope that Antonio has cast for the first-born forecasts violent death, yet this child survives; both Antonio and the Duchess admit that she is much talked about, yet she insists to Ferdinand that her reputation is safe; finally, there is a mention of the Duchess' son by her first marriage, yet Ferdinand expects to inherit her wealth, and at the end her son by Antonio is pushed forward as the heir. Some of the inconsistencies, Leech says, simply show Elizabethan inattention to detail. But they also, he points out, anticipate defects in the later plays. Many of the characters from these lesser plays — Romelio (The Devil's Law-Case) and Appius, for example — are not humans but simply parts for actors. He analyzes the character of Ferdinand and finds it to be inconsistent, blurred in its conception. And Webster's world, he finds to be "...a place where men are madly driven toward death, where the sole value, the one possible human achievement, is a mind unbroken to the end." Finally, despite the lack of moral

58 Clifford Leech, John Webster (London, 1951), pp. 66-68. Other possible explanations of some of these apparent structural errors will be pointed out in Chapter IV.

59 Ibid., p. 90-98.

60 Ibid., pp. 98-106.

61 Ibid., p. 89. This view foreshadows later views of Webster's world.
view and the sloppy construction, Webster ranks second to Shakespeare as a writer for the stage in Leech's overall view because he created good characters, memorable characters for competent actors, and because in his poetry are flashes of brilliance, especially in his use of common words in appropriate contexts.

Finally, there are two others who criticize Webster for his lack of moral purpose as a unifying element. J. R. Mulryne says, "His sensibility demanded the creation of a world in which no set of values is shown as the 'right' one, no attitude as intrinsically better than any other; a world of, in the most literal sense, moral and emotional anarchy."62 Robert Ornstein finds Webster no moralist. The White Devil, he says, lacks moral emphasis and focus; The Duchess of Malfi he finds superior because "...it offers a more coherent and profound interpretation of experience."63 Yet in neither play does Webster attempt to explain or to justify calamity; he attempts only to demonstrate how to stand up to it and accept it. And Ornstein accepts to a degree the validity of the Archer attack. At the outset of his essay he says, "For however inadequate Archer's critical theories were, his attacks on the formlessness of Webster's tragedies contained an irreducible kernel of aesthetic truth."64

64 Ibid., p. 128.
Madeleine Doran is a scholar who sees some moral purpose in the tragedies. She says that in Webster, who is among those "...who are of a naturally reflective habit, the ethical generalizing is an essential element in the tone of the plays, not at cross-purposes with the major emphasis. It reinforces rather than wars with the ethical implications of the plays." But she does not feel that the ethical content gives the plays unity, for "Webster betrays a conflict between the Christian ethics that lie on the surface of his tragedies, and a deeper, hardly definable, more defiant and more despairing response to the human condition." Webster's fault, according to Doran, is a failure of direction. He seems uncertain about the two patterns of tragedy: the responsibility for the hero's fall on the unpredictable world of chance, or on his free choice, the dictates of his passions. She accuses Webster of an "...inveterate habit of emphasis on good theater at the expense of artistic consistency, or on vivid sympathetic insights at the expense of ethical coherence."

There are those critics, too, who take the view that there are a moral purpose and a moral unity in the Webster tragedies. James Smith says that most scholars agree that Webster lacks ability in dramatic construction. Some, he continues, say that the great poetry makes up for this lack, while others disagree with this notion. But perhaps Webster

66 Ibid., p. 357.
67 Ibid., p. 355.

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was not attempting the type of construction that he is accused of not being able to handle; perhaps despite inequalities *The White Devil* as an artistic whole is effective. He attempts, then, to demonstrate this thesis. In the opening scene of *The White Devil*, by opposing two negative values, Webster is pointing up a positive value. Smith explains in this way:

Antonelli and Gasparo rebuke Ludovico for his brutish lack of prudence; he them, for their diabolic cunning. And thus, by something it would not be improper to call construction, standards are introduced into the picture of a world of evil; though as yet there is no one in it who illustrates them by his actions or his words. 68

The unity, Smith suggests, comes from the interplay of lines, scenes and acts:

They are to be thought of not so much as following one another, but as existing side by side. They come of course in chronological succession, but Webster's interest is so little in this that either he does not suggest it (thereby laying himself open to the charge of not knowing how to construct): or he does so by undistinguished means -- such as dumb-show, or soliloquies like Francisco's. This is not a soliloquy in the accepted meaning of the term, but the speech is a prolocutor. The acts as a whole do not show the development of the different stages. Rather I think they show different aspects of the same theme -- the workings of evil which, though among the same people, must vary indefinitely. For it cannot rest until it is extinguished. 69

He concludes by pointing out that in most Jacobean tragedies of blood the world of evil is presented from the outside; its effects on a character not of that world are shown. And it seems reasonable that that world will continue. But in *The White Devil* it is shown from the inside and the

69 Ibid., 278.
spectator supplies the order he desires for it. This holds the viewer throughout the play till that order is brought about at the end.\textsuperscript{70}

Another critic who finds Webster a moral writer is Lord David Cecil. Cecil defends Webster's dramaturgy on grounds similar to those of Lucas, saying that Webster gave his audience what it wanted: "...sensation; an exciting plot, in which grand and glamorous personages went through the most extraordinary vicissitudes of fortune, involving many murders and suicides and ghosts and lunatics and scenes of torture or pageantry as could be crammed into two hours."\textsuperscript{71} But Cecil is more interested in the unity gained from Webster's moral purpose. What Webster had, says Cecil, was "...intellectual and spiritual insight. He uses the Elizabethan freedom to express a vision of the conflict of spiritual forces that, in his view, lie behind the appearances of life as we see it. This is what gives his work unity and significance."\textsuperscript{72} Webster's vision is a moral vision, a vision of life as a struggle between right and wrong or good and evil. And as a child of the age, the age of the Reformation, he sees the struggle in religious terms. An evil act is a sin against the moral law of God, and it

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 280.


\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p. 29.
is a voluntary breach of the moral law. These immoral acts cause tragedy. "Indeed his subject matter may be summed up as a study of the working of sin in the world."\textsuperscript{73}

The argument presented by Irving Ribner is, in many ways, an extension of Cecil's view; for he too sees the world of Websterian tragedy as a place of moral order. He says of the dramatist,

He bases this order not upon divine influence in human affairs, but in a celebration of the dignity of human life which renders man superior to his world, and he finds his basis for morality in the need to preserve this dignity which separates man from beast at any cost for it is man's only weapon against the chaos of the world.\textsuperscript{74}

In Webster, Ribner continues, the moral vision is expressed in terms of characters who resemble real men and women in situations that are likely to have occurred. Like the medieval drama from which they are descended, these plays use a specific symbol to express a universal truth. The dramatists are more interested in mankind than in men and they often sacrifice consistency of character to the needs of the overall symbolic statement.\textsuperscript{75} Ribner points out that many critics see Webster as a dramatist without moral vision, but the tragedies "...do not reveal a philosophy of negation or despair, for Webster's concern is with ability of man to survive in such a world without direction, to maintain his human worth in spite of all. Webster bases his faith upon

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 30.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 11.
human integrity and in the nobility to which human life can aspire in spite of the disorder which surrounds it."\(^7\) Of The White Devil, Ribner says that mood, action, characterization and poetry all unify the play by asserting the inherent dignity of man.\(^7\) And of The Duchess of Malfi he says that we see "...the final moral statement to which all of the parts of The Duchess of Malfi were carefully designed to give poetic expression": man's ability to accept pain and frustration yet die with courage and dignity.\(^7\) Ribner's view speaks well for Webster's dramaturgy.

Another writer who sees the Websterian tragedies as statements concerning the integrity of life is Travis Bogard. In Webster we have, he says, satire and tragedy combined for a high ethical purpose.\(^9\) Though the world of Websterian tragedy is, as Bogard sees it, a decaying one in which only death is sure for the good as well as evil characters, Webster realized that there was a glory about life, however stained it appeared. Especially there was a grandeur in the capacity of individuals to struggle to maintain their integrity. Since integrity of life was the one thing which the forces of oppression and mortality could not shatter, its retention was valuable in itself. Satire, therefore, could reveal nothing rotten about either the capacity for struggle or the preservation of integrity. These great qualities alone in men were not illusion.\(^8\)

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 100.
\(^7\) Ibid., p. 109.
\(^7\) Ibid., p. 122.
\(^8\) Ibid., p. 100.
Bogard also suggests that by "...skillful integration of satiric comment with tragic narrative...Webster reveals himself to be a master of the dramatic medium."\(^{81}\)

Finally, Gunnar Boklund also sees the theme of the integrity of life running through the plays. In a world in which lust, violence and wanton cruelty are the normal state, integrity is all that one has left. But even this integrity is futile in Boklund's view, for man lives "...in the deep pit of darkness from whence no conceivable integrity will help us up."\(^{82}\)

The opposing opinions concerning this aspect of Webster's art are summed up by John Russell Brown in his introduction to the Revels Edition of *The White Devil*:

Critical opinion cannot speak with certain or united voice about Webster's purposes; it has proved possible to talk of him as an old-fashioned moralist, as a sensationalist, as a social dramatist, as an imagist or dramatic symphonist, as a man fascinated by death, or a man halting between his inherited and his individual values.\(^{83}\)

\(^{81}\) Ibid., p. 115. Two recent essays attempt to refute Bogard's view of Webster's tragic satire. "The confusion in The Duchess of Malfi seems to me to arise from an injudicious mixing of, and failure to integrate, the comic and the satiric elements. These elements are so pronounced as to weaken, if not destroy, the tragic effect." (Jane Marie Luecke, "The Duchess of Malfi: Comic and Satiric Confusion in a Tragedy," *Studies in English Literature*, IV (1964), 276.) and George F. Sensabaugh feels that tragic and satiric effects are improperly balanced in *The White Devil*, thereby losing tragic effect. ("Tragic Effects in Webster's *The White Devil*," *Studies in English Literature*, V (1965), 345-361.)


\(^{83}\) Brown, p. xliii. 

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There are, indeed, other views of Webster's unifying purpose, or lack of it, than those already mentioned. Cecil Davies feels that "...certain themes, some major and some minor, are both exemplified in the fable and expressed in the imagery." And James Calderwood offers the view "...that the play [The Duchess of Malfi] is, among other things a powerful and subtle articulation of a thoroughly Elizabethan theme -- the relationship between individual impulse and societal norms, specifically the religious and political doctrine of Degree." My view, which I shall try to develop in the discussions of the dramaturgy of the plays, is that Webster's purpose, seen through all of his plays, is to attack hypocrisy in many of its forms. Throughout the Webster canon, there is a difference between appearance and reality; things are not what they seem. This attack on hypocrisy is a unifying element not only in the individual plays, but also throughout all the plays.

Before turning to a discussion of the general nature of Elizabethan dramaturgy, the principles to be applied to the plays of John Webster, I offer the following as a statement of the critical principle I attempt to follow. In discussing The Duchess of Malfi, Hardin Craig says that we must judge plays in the light of the time in which they were written:

In the case cited, we must accept Websterian dramaturgy not only as a matter of course but as an adequate though

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careless art form. Historical criticism has no occasion to praise or blame, no occasion to allocate the performances of a past age with those of our age and say "This is better or that worse," unless it acknowledges that what seems to us good or bad seems so because we believe in it or disbelieve in it, or because it conforms or does not conform to our standards of excellence. 86

II. A RENAISSANCE THEORY OF DRAMA

John Webster was a man of his time, a dramatist of his times. The dramaturgy of Webster's plays follows, in general, the usual dramatic construction of Renaissance plays. Many writers have described Renaissance dramaturgy, various writers emphasizing different aspects of it. This chapter, therefore, will attempt a synthesis of the views of various writers on the subject so that a general sort of theory can be evolved. Webster's plays can then be studied closely as products of this Renaissance theory of drama.

It is difficult to theorize about Elizabethan dramatic construction, for the dramatists themselves did little theorizing. Although there was dramatic criticism in the Renaissance, apparently the dramatists themselves paid little attention to it. As Muriel Bradbrook points out,

The Elizabethan stage has no rules; even those tacitly observed, like Lawrence's law of re-entry, may never have been conscious, much less formulated. The fact that investigators have to reconstruct what the dramatists merely accepted tends to make them more conscious of their formulae.¹

Sir Phillip Sidney theorized about the drama, but Sidney was killed in 1586; he never saw the great plays of the Elizabethan period. Sidney's dramatic criticism was neo-classical, based

¹ Muriel C. Bradbrook, Elizabethan Stage Conditions (Hamden, Conn., 1961), p. 6. See also David Klein, Literary Criticism from the Elizabethan Dramatists (New York, 1917). Klein points out that in general the practice preceded the theory which, except for Jonson's, was romantic (pp. 241-2).

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on the faulty interpretation of Aristotle which began with the Roman critics and was carried on into the Renaissance by the Italian and French critics. Sidney continued the error of taking Aristotle's observation of conventions for dramatic law:

To be sure many of the theatric extravagances of time and space which Sidney berates are unnecessary and even nonsensical. Sidney is quick to cite these weaknesses which are easy to parody, but what he does not note is that they are unimportant details in a construction of the whole. Sidney fails to recognize the difference between dramatic principles and dramatic conventions.\(^2\)

Sidney shows a distinct distaste for the theater of his day. Alwin Thaler attempts to show that Shakespeare was acquainted with Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* and makes a good case,\(^3\) but if Shakespeare were familiar with it, which he probably was, he certainly paid little attention to principles outlined in it; and Thaler readily admits this fact.

Jonson was both a critic and a practicing dramatist. As a critic he was a neo-classicist, but he saw that audiences didn't like his tragedies written according to neo-classical principles. English Renaissance dramatists evidently knew what their Spanish contemporary, Lope de Vega, wrote in *New Art of Making Comedies in This Time*: one must please an audience, not follow the ancients slavishly.

The Elizabethan dramatists probably knew little of Greek

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tragedy, perhaps knew a little of Aristotle but not much more of the Greeks. They knew the Roman tragedy, Seneca; they knew Roman criticism. But most of what Aristotle discusses is purely convention of the Greek theater, not dramatic principle. The rules, taken from Aristotle, were made in a much later age. He was a permissive critic. Such things as the single plot, the noble family, lack of violence on stage, the unities, the chorus, are all conventions to Aristotle. It was Horace who formulated strict dramatic rules from Aristotle's conventions. And the Renaissance critics were influenced by Horace rather than by Aristotle. They paid lip service to Aristotle while following Horace. Mary Carpo Hyde says of the Elizabethans that they "...bowed to the authority of the ancients in dramatic principles, but in dramatic conventions they followed the dictates of public taste."4 The Elizabethan dramatist was apparently a man of great independence. He followed dramatic conventions where they were valid for the theater of his time.

The Renaissance theater was quite different from the Greek theater. The Greek was a focused theater, the Renaissance a panoramic theater. Movement and change of setting are distinguishing characteristics of this panoramic theater. The early cathedral plays, the cycles, and the Elizabethan theater were panoramic. In this type of theater there was rapid and conventional change of time and place with much action going on before the audience's eyes. Such

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4 Hyde, p. 3.
action would preclude many of the conventions of which Aristotle wrote, conventions which were formulated into dramatic principles by Latin critics and further codified by Renaissance critics. So we find that Renaissance criticism had attempted to take the conventions of a theater of one time and make them the dramatic principles of a different theater of a different time. The Elizabethan dramatists suffered no such confusion, for the Elizabethan theater developed from the stock of the traditional Medieval drama and adapted some characteristics of Senecan drama. The popular drama took what it could use from Renaissance neo-classicism. One might say that there were two schools of drama in the Renaissance, the neo-classical school which made rules and dictums and the popular school which made plays.

First, it might be well to summarize what are thought to be the chief aspects of Senecan tragedy which can be found in the drama of the Renaissance. Although in the sixteenth century there were some plays written which were, apparently, imitations of Seneca, by the seventeenth century Seneca had become only an influence on the drama. As Henry W. Wells points out, most of the studies of Senecan influence on Renaissance drama are too one-sided. Cunliffe, Lucas, and T. S. Eliot, for example, place too much emphasis on Seneca's influence, Howard Baker and others, too little.

There are some apparently Senecan characteristics which can be seen in Elizabethan drama. These are first, sensational themes such as murder, revenge, adultery and incest; second, ghosts and furies; third, psychology in self-revelatory soliloquies; fourth, epigrammatic speech and reply in alternating lines; fifth, artificial bombastic style; sixth, the five-act structure; seventh, the nuntius; eighth, the confidant. These things we find in Senecan tragedy; we also find them in some varying numbers in some Elizabethan tragedies. And there is also, as Wells points out, Senecan influence in ideas and in tone rather than in details of style. As Madeleine Doran puts it, "Senecan Tragedy was a powerful formative element that gave impetus to popular tragedy, but soon lost its identity in a stream composed of many currents."  

But Miss Doran sees as one of the greatest shaping influences on Renaissance drama the romantic story which came from the Medieval drama, specifically from the miracle play. From the De Casibus tale, the story of the fall of a man from power through the turn of Fortune's wheel, comes tragedy. In addition to this type of tragedy, there is also the Italianate tragedy of intrigue. This type of tragedy shows a greater Senecan influence than do the other types. The Italianate tragedy centers about crimes of passion. Revenge often operates as a motive in the rise and fall, and ambition is often a motive in these plays. Italianate tragedy is bloody, deals with persons of high rank,

6 Doran, p. 105.
has a reversal and ends in death. Unlike Greek tragedy, there is often no religious element. Love or jealous hate is frequently the exciting force of the Italianate tragedy. The study of the unhappiness of the relationship between the sexes gives the opportunity for deep tragic feeling. There is, in these plays, much psychological study of behavior, especially pathological behavior. There is also much satire on sex. To quote again from Miss Doran,

The interests in psychology and in satire joined hands in the favorite malcontent type, with his bitter wit exposing all the ugliness of the society around him. The result, at its best, of this amalgam of psychology, satire and moral gloom is a tragedy of intensely conceived characters -- not always attractive and often unbalanced emotionally -- caught in an evil world of adultery, incest and murder.7

Webster's two great tragedies fall into this latter category of plays. A third type of tragedy is domestic tragedy, such plays as Arden of Feversham and A Woman Killed With Kindness, which comes from the morality play. It follows a pattern of temptation, sin, repentance and punishment from the morality; but it is also a dramatization of then current stories. The setting is bourgeois and English. Sometimes the treatment is sentimental.8

Howard Baker, in Induction to Tragedy, attempts to show how all purported Senecan influences come from Medieval forms. The five-act structure, he says, comes from Medieval comedy; the chorus comes from Medieval and early Renaissance tragedies; the unities, he points out, were never observed

7 Ibid., p. 138.
8 See Doran, pp. 142-146.
in early English drama; the keeping of violence from the stage was long violated in Medieval religious drama; a nuntius often appears because casts of characters were traditionally given in Latin; ghosts were the guides in Medieval metrical tragedies. Revenge, he holds, appears as the motive in many classical and Medieval works, not peculiarly in Seneca; sensationalism was used in the middle ages, and sententious precepts are the writers' reflections of attitudes of their own age. It seems, however, that it is now almost impossible to judge exactly what parts of the drama of the Renaissance theater came directly from the Medieval heritage and what parts are Senecan influences.

In order to theorize about Renaissance drama, the critic must bear in mind that there were many conventions which were observed, apparently, by the playwrights. Whether these conventions were new to the Renaissance stage, were inherited from the Medieval tradition, or were influences of Senecan tragedy is relatively immaterial. To understand the dramaturgy of this period, the critic must know of them. For example, the Elizabethan dramatist wrote for a popular audience which was unaware of dramatic theory. The dramatist wrote to please his audience, an audience which did not expect complete realism. It accepted the convention that there was the world of the play and the real world. The play is, after all, an imitation of life. The audience was always

9 Howard Baker, Induction to Tragedy (Baton Rouge, 1939), Chapter III. See also Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley, 1936).
aware of this duality, and the dramatist, from time to time, reminded it that this was the case. This fact sometimes confuses modern critics of Elizabethan drama who feel that the plays can be criticized as pieces of realism or naturalism as modern plays can.

A convention, as explained by Muriel Bradbrook, is an agreement between writers and readers through which the writer can simplify and take short cuts in order to achieve greater concentration and emphasis. The dramatists of the earlier seventeenth century observed many conventions, some of them stemming from the limitations of their theater. The stage in the Elizabethan theater was neutral, hence flexible. There were some sets, but not much was done toward this aspect of realism. The degree of realism was varied.

The idea of an unlocalized or multiple stage came from the Medieval tradition. In the Medieval theater various "mansions" were arranged about the stage. A particular "mansion" was localized when an actor used it. (This system frees time as well as place.) There was also, in front of the "mansion," a neutral ground. The pageant wagons of the English cycles presented a slightly different kind of stage, for a wagon contained more than one place. The idea of a fixed place on the stage came from the Roman theater and was used, to some extent, in the English academic theater. The public playhouses of the Renaissance selected from both the classical idea and the inn yard tradition of the

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10 Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions, p. 4.
middle ages. Inner and outer stage and several levels gave the fluidity, although the successive scene principle was followed. The sense of time is partly dependent on place; therefore it is not surprising that time was often disordered, often omitted in Elizabethan drama. Even in a realistic drama, it is an accepted convention that shortening of time is necessary. Because of the neutral stage, succession of events could not be clearly ordered. Time and space could both be dealt with cavalierly, altered or neglected.

The flexible stage led away from the unity of action as did the romantic story. To achieve this unity, the Renaissance dramatist used several means. One was the single, striking, dominant figure. Another was the concentration on a single action: crime and revenge, or unhappy love becoming happy love. A third way to achieve unity of action was through unity of tone: parody, humor and satire were often used to unify different actions. Setting, especially as it occurred in dialogue, could also lend unity. Finally, and quite important, the language of the drama was often a unifying agent.

Poetry was a convention of Renaissance drama, and imagery is one of the most important aspects of poetry. Una Ellis-Fermor, in discussing some of the functions of poetic imagery, says,

Imagery and prosody, together with certain bold conventions and even devices of setting, serve in various ways to overcome the disadvantages of
that brevity which is essential to the concentra-
tion and immediacy of drama. 11

She goes on to point out that imagery that is functional
increases dramatic concentration. It quickly reveals the
relationship between an abstract theme and something closer
to experience. It lets the audience perceive just the
relationship that the poet perceived. It reveals the presence
and nature of the universe in which the play occurs more
rapidly than can be done in any other way. Imagery also
enriches the content and implications that lie within the
play itself. The emphasis of the underlying mood is often
given this way. The mood is set by means of poetic imagery.

There were other conventions related both to the writing
and the production of a Renaissance play. The costumes used
on the stage were rich and ornate, but it was a convention
that disguise would be accepted by the audience as completely
hiding the true identity of the wearer. Stage effects were
often spectacular; music and ringing bells were often
important. The delivery of the actor was probably more
formal and stylized than it is in the modern theater. 12
Perhaps his movements were somewhat exaggerated, and possibly
some of his posture was conventional. It is thought that
certain emotions might have been accompanied by certain
movements; for grief, the actor might throw himself down on

11 Una Ellis-Fermor, The Frontiers of Drama (London,
1945), p. 77.

12 See also B. L. Joseph, Elizabethan Acting (London, 1951)
and Alfred Harbage, "Elizabethan Acting," PMLA LIV (1939)
685-708.

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the stage; for joy, he might cut a caper. He had to be something of a gymnast and a duelist. There was much violent action over which the actor had to make himself heard. The other players just stood around out of character during a long speech. All of these were conventions of the theater as was the convention of occasionally writing a part with a particular actor of the company in mind. A technical problem, the revelation of a thought, was also overcome by the use of the convention of the soliloquy or the aside. This convention was accepted by the audience as the only means by which these thoughts could be conveyed. There were some other things expected of the dramatist in his play: costumes and props, song and dance, fighting, parts for particular actors, bawdry and clowning, sententiousness, jests, a strict moral code and topical allusions were all looked for by the audience in the theater. Not all were always found, however. The audience was an active one that helped the playwright. It didn't demand absolute reality; it was trained to recognize dramatic symbols. Inconsistencies arising from the lack of actresses, from multiple casting and from representative characterizations (for example, two-man armies or courts) were accepted. The audience was also prepared to accept the physical limitations of the theater.

There were, in addition to those mentioned above, conventions concerning the treatment of character. Many of the characters were stock types, some from Medieval drama, some
from classical drama. The doctrine of decorum in the Renaissance became something of a convention in the depiction of characters, decorum and verisimilitude demanding that certain characters behave and react in certain ways. Ideal truth asked that characters be types, the idea of propriety in Aristotle. Madeleine Doran says of this doctrine,

> By the sixteenth century, this had become an elaborate doctrine of types, recognized as established by the practice of Latin comedy and by Horace's insistent doctrine of decorum, and given enormous weight by the hierarchical structure of society.\(^\text{13}\)

Speech and behavior had to be appropriate to person, place, time and purpose. The traits of each type were defined. Women, for example, were easy victims of persuasion. If they could not be persuaded, they were made of superior stuff. This doctrine of verisimilitude in character is found in Aristotle, Horace, Cicero and on into the Italian and English Renaissance critics (Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric*, for example). Terence and Plautus reinforced the teachings of this view of character. The Elizabethan dramatist learned the doctrine of decorum of character in his study of rhetoric in school. The Medieval tradition brought types in the satire, the exemplum and the morality play. Personification of virtues and vices also developed into types. Psychology and physiology (the humors) furnished types up to a point, but there were too many possible combinations and variations of the humors. They did furnish a vocabulary and some boundaries

\(^{13}\) Doran, p. 77.
for characters to playwrights. The humor character was usually depicted against a typical background. There were different kinds of types, gradations of type:

A type presents in abstract certain features common to a class; a humor is a human being reduced to dominant principle; an allegorical figure personalizes an abstraction; a symbol stands for a greater reality, human or divine; all are simplifications of the actual, and are simplified to take their place in an interpretation of experience. 14

Though the psychology (that is, the humors) of men governed their behavior to some extent, passions could sweep through a man without warning and change his expected behavior completely. Women, being short of reason, were even more subject than were men to these swift changes of passion.

The Elizabethan audience would often accept a story for its own sake without questioning motivation. And often the audience had so to accept a story because the Italian novelle, frequently almost entirely lacking in motivation, were the sources. The narrative technique in Renaissance drama, presenting a story sequentially from beginning to end, gave much action, but sometimes only suggested motivation. The conventions of the soliloquy and the aside, which depended on the audience's consciousness of the play world as opposed to the real world, were used to show motivation.

The playwright sometimes concentrated on one scene without regard to total unity. This device is called by Schücking15

"episodic intensification." It often occurred in the collabora-
bations. Sometimes in concentrating on a speech, the
dramatist disregarded character; this disregard of character
is depersonalization (Bradbrook's term). These two devices
sometimes give a different view of the nature of the character.

There is often a notable inconsistency of characteriza-
tion. Sometimes a character grows to an importance not
planned for him. The late and sudden appearance of a new
character is often an Elizabethan interpretation of the
Deus ex Machina. Other characters have an equally unfor-
tunate habit of disappearing, sometimes permanently. An
explanation of this could be the simple fact that one actor
played multiple roles. There are also unexplained changes
in a character's appearance and characterization and in a
character's feelings or relationship with another character.
These changes are perhaps the result of the playwright's haste
and lack of care, not of flagrant lack of critical and
dramaturgic sense. There was not much worry among the drama-
tists about psychology as we know it. It was quite all right
for a character to believe anything he was told and to believe
the exact opposite if told it later. Introspection in a
character was usually the result of conscience or remorse.
Instantaneous and arbitrary decisions were quite acceptable. 16

Though theories stressed character types, the dramatists
were not inhibited by the theories. Consistency in charac-
terization is sometimes lacking because of emphasis on story

16 For examples of such inconsistencies, see Hyde, pp.
204-225.
and action, dramatic situation and passions. But in losing some consistency in character, the dramatist often gains vividness in individual scenes. When the emphasis was on the story, the characters were sometimes static; but often they were dynamic. Motivation wasn't extremely important though it was sometimes shown in speech and action.17

The importance of character depiction and of the functions of characters is great; for all drama, including that of the Renaissance, is a story presented in dialogue by actors before an audience. Brander Matthews18 points out Ferdinand Brunetièrè's rule of the drama; the essential character wants something and tries to get it. His try causes the action. Drama can be defined as a form showing a human being's will in action, a will determined to achieve a goal. This definition helps to classify dramas. If the conflict is with fate, the character can't win and we have the inevitable fall of tragedy. If the conflict is between human wills, we can have comedy. If the conflict is with serious mores or conventions, we have serious drama without the necessity of tragedy. If it is with some frivolous convention, a custom, we have farce. Brunetièrè's emphasis is not on the conflict as the basis of drama, but on the act of volition that causes conflict as the basis. This emphasis makes Brunetièrè Aristotelian, but not simply an interpreter

17 For a more detailed discussion of character, see Doran, pp. 216-258.
of Aristotle, for Brunetière shifts the emphasis from outer struggle, which can be quite crude, to will. In the drama, there are certain scenes which must be presented to the audience in order to show it the conflict between wills. They cannot be avoided if the audience's interest is to be held. These are the scènes à faire or obligatory scenes. The playwright must let the audience see what Matthews calls "clash of contending determinations."¹⁹ The action of the play stems from the action of the characters in their acts of volition.

The characters, action, poetry and all other aspects of a play function together to achieve an overall purpose, the statement of a theme. Drama is an art with a purpose.

According to historic evidence a play must give meaning to its tears or laughter. This eternal quality of meaning in a play may be oppressively moral or gaily impreceptible, but it is always present in some form, representing the author's interpretation of his chosen dramatic theme. The term theme may be defined as the basis of any play, the dominant emotion such as love, hate, ambition, pride, jealousy, avarice and so on. The author's point of view is shown by his sympathetic or hostile treatment of the struggle of his hero who personifies the emotion. The hero's final triumph or defeat, his reward or punishment, is a resume of the author's purpose.²⁰

What is true of drama generally is true of Elizabethan drama specifically. The audience recognized numerous popular themes. Ambition and revenge are common themes. In the Renaissance tragedy of ambition as in the Tudor morality play,

¹⁹ Matthews, p. 106.
the protagonist is blinded by pursuit of material things and power. The moral of Elizabethan tragedy is the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice. But there is a great choice in the type and treatment of the crime, with the emphasis either on terror or on pity.

Some of the popular themes of comedy on the Elizabethan stage are harmless merriment, in which we find a little exemplum, a little plot, usually a little satire, most often in characterization, and other pleasurable devices. Such a play is Dekker and Webster's *Westward Ho!* Other popular comic themes include love, prodigality, patience (often a foil to prodigality) and gulling and guilling. All these themes can be treated romantically, realistically, satirically or farcically. Satire is intended to expose vice and folly. Careful examination of integrity or the testing of virtue or patience as means of exposing vice and folly are frequent themes of satire.

If the playwright of the Renaissance followed no rules in the construction of a play, the modern critic must attempt to apply some sort of standard of construction evolved from the study of playwrights' products. Such a standard has been evolved by such critics as Brunetière, Freytag and Morris. What follows is indebted largely to the valuable little book of the last named.\(^{21}\)

A play logically falls into two parts, rising and falling action. The juncture of these two is the climax or turning

\(^{21}\) Elisabeth Woodbridge Morris, *The Drama. Its Law and Its*
point. Within this scheme there are two possibilities for the movement of the action. The first possibility is that the hero takes the initiative. The focus is on him. The second is that the hero is passive and acts only when driven to it by the antagonist who is the aggressor. The focus in this case is on the antagonist. With the first kind, the second half of the play is likely to be weak. Greek tragedy doesn't fit this scheme because it begins at the turning point. The Greek audience knew all about, for example, Oedipus' slaying his father and marrying his mother and bringing evil on the kingdom. All this would be the rising action and would fit into type one.

There are five logical divisions of the action of a play. The exposition gives the viewer all the information he needs to view the play intelligently. It tells him who the speakers are, prepares for the characters, at least hints of the time and place and perhaps sets the tone. There is often a certain artificiality which is unavoidable. Sometimes the hero appears in this scene; often he comes in at the end of it. There were in the Renaissance many different ways of presenting the exposition. It could be done through a prologue with an introducer, a character who does not appear in the play at all. The exposition can be presented through the dialogue of the minor characters of the play. Third, we can have the protagonist himself on stage at the

Technique (Boston, 1898). See also Gustav Freytag, Technique of the Drama, translated by Elias T. MacEwan (Chicago, 1900), and Ferdinand Brunetière, The Law of the Drama, translated by Philip M. Hayden (New York, 1914).
beginning, presenting the exposition through dialogue.

The second division is the rising action which begins with the exciting force. This is the force, the action, which precipitates the conflict that changes things from their condition of repose. Through the course of the rising action, the force in action, be it antagonist or protagonist, shows a continual ascendency; but the opposing force must be introduced and the characters representing it identified.

The third part is the turning point or climax. It is that point at which the activity of the aggressor force is completed. It is the end of the rising action, and it is organically connected with the rising action. In a well-constructed play, it is not a separate part. After this point, the reversal begins; the other force takes the initiative, becomes the aggressor. The end of the rising action and the beginning of the falling action occur in the same scene or scene group and are not necessarily separable. In the type of play in which the hero is the first aggressor, the turning point marks the end of his accomplishment, the checking of the opposing force. The emphasis then shifts from him to the force of the antagonist. In the other type the turning point marks the shift of the hero from passivity to activity. In a play in which the conflict is internal, the turning point occurs when the force which ultimately is to conquer first gains the upper hand. Although the climax is often an imposing scene, it is not necessarily so. It should, however, be emphatic, both spiritually and outwardly.
The fourth part of the action is the falling action. It is begun by the tragic force which is analogous to the exciting force. The tragic force and the climax are sometimes the same. It is the initiation of the reverse action which brings about the catastrophe. After the climax the suspense wanes. Two devices help to avoid a slow falling action: one, postponement of the climax until mechanically late in the play and, two, insertion of a scene of final suspense or a moment of last suspense. Sometimes this part isn't a whole scene.

The final part of the action is, in tragedy, the catastrophe. This usually means the death of the hero, for death is permanent and final. The catastrophe is the termination of the action; it brings an equilibrium of forces which seems to be quite final.

Although act divisions are mechanical rather than logical divisions, acts can have a rise, a climax and a fall. In Renaissance drama they sometimes do but frequently do not. In the English sense a scene ends when the stage is cleared. A new scene begins with the next entrance. A scene, too, can be an organic unity building to its own high point; but, again, it is not always such a unity. The Elizabethans did, however, generally tend to write by scenes.

In tragedy we have two opposing forces, one of which overthrows the other. In comedy we have an aggressor and a victim. The plan, therefore, of a comedy plot differs from that of the serious drama in the character of its conflict. In comedy there is a freedom to use chance or accident and there is an absence of a true climax and a true falling action.
There is also a difference in the comedy plot in the nature of its catastrophe. In romantic comedies the treatment of plot and character is generally fairly serious, whereas in the intrigue comedy there is only vague exposition, perhaps no inciting incident, no turning point, no falling action. The romantic comedy is more likely to have these, for there is more likely to be a real conflict between opposing forces than someone victimized by an intriguer.

Howard Baker summarizes the construction of Renaissance tragedy in attempting to show how it developed from Medieval roots. The tragic story in the middle ages, he says followed a pyramidal structure (as described above) as did Renaissance tragedy: the ascent to worldly success, the achievement of the top, and the fall. "The action of the story...recapitulated in form the image of man's rise and fall upon the Wheel of Fortune."\(^22\) Other aspects of the construction of Renaissance tragedy that Baker discusses are extensive action, dramatic exposition, motive stemming from the action, focus on one character, single dominating passion, introspective characters, evolving characters, wholly evil characters, and the catastrophe of death.\(^23\) These aspects all fit with the pyramidal structure.

In the course of this paper, I shall attempt to show that Webster was not a dramaturgic bungler, as has been

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\(^{22}\) Baker, p. 155.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., pp. 154-179.
thought by some critics. Webster was a Renaissance playwright writing for a popular audience. He observed the conventions of his theater and, in general, constructed his plays along the lines of the pyramidal form described in this chapter.
III. THE WHITE DEVIL

The White Devil, written between 1609 and 1612,\(^1\) is the first play that Webster wrote on his own rather than with collaborators. (The 1612 date seems to be the most likely.) Previous to the writing of this play he had labored with Dekker and others on Henslowe's assembly line for plays; this time was a period of apprenticeship. By 1612 he had emerged a journeyman playwright, if not a master of his craft, at least a competent workman.

Webster's workmanship is evident from the first scene of The White Devil. The opening of the play is characteristic of the opening scene of a play in the London theater of the time. Without such amenities as a front curtain and house and stage lights, the dramatist had to catch the attention of a noisy audience through dialogue and/or action. Webster opens the play with Lodovico's loud and disgusted "Banisht!" The line can be delivered with enough emphasis to attract the attention of the audience; but should anyone miss the word, it is repeated in line 39.\(^2\) The opening is further typical in that it catches the characters in the middle of a conversation, thus stimulating the interest of the audience and forcing its close attention.

This scene, one of the most frequently commented upon

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\(^2\) All references to lines, scenes and acts follow the Lucas edition.
scenes of the play,\(^3\) presents much of the exposition, initiates a theme, and sets the mood of the play; further it gives some initial characterization. In Lodovico’s angry denunciation of Brachiano, the audience hears much of the exposition. In seven lines (38-44) Brachiano’s pursuit of Vittoria is made known and a motive for Lodovico’s later actions against Brachiano and Vittoria is given: Vittoria, through Brachiano, could have secured Lodovico’s pardon and prevented his banishment if she had wished. The theme of the hypocrisy of unequal justice is implied by Lodovico’s diatribe; Webster condemns the fact that there are two levels of justice, one for the puissant and one for the weak; Flamineo makes many comments on this inequality throughout the play. Finally, the mood of the play is set in this scene; The White Devil is to be a play of vindictiveness and revenge; the atmosphere is menacing and evil.

As has been noted above, the first scene of The White Devil has evoked much critical comment. It is a good scene, economically (only sixty-two lines) giving much exposition and setting the mood of the play; therefore it would be well both to consider a few critical comments and to look at the scene in some detail. James Smith notes that the opening of the play is abrupt. It shows, he says, something about the character of Lodovico through the short bursts of sentences: Lodovico’s mind is both disorderly and decisive. The lines of Gasparo and Antonelli are regular and contrast

\(^3\) Cf. below.
to Lodovico's, but their talk of justice seems to be hypocrical. By opposing two moral values in this opening scene, Smith asserts, Webster is pointing up a positive value. 4 Another critic who finds the first scene important for setting the mood is Clifford Leech:

The first scene with Lodovico strikes the keynote for the play. Here is a man given over to evil doing, who urges that he is no guiltier than the rest, who is not to be taught, not to be consoled, who will go straight on his path of evil. 5

To Leech, Lodovico symbolizes the lack of order in Webster's universe and Vittoria, Brachiano and Flamineo all resemble him; the imperfection of society and the corruption of court and of courtly power are seen here. The use of imagery in establishing the mood is emphasized by Ellis-Fermor, who says,

In the first scene of his Vittoria Carombona, where the fate of Lodovico reveals in miniature the passions and forces at work on the main action of the play, the speeches are shot with imagery that is prophetic not only of those passions, but of the kind of events they may (and in fact do) draw down. 6

The imagery and the language of this scene are quite important, as Ellis-Fermor points out, in foreshadowing future events. After Lodovico disgustedly spits out "Courtly reward/And punishment," (3-4) he says,

Fortun's a right whore.
If she gives ought, she deales it in smal percels,
That she may take away all at one swope. (4-6)

4 See pp. 21-22 above for Smith's conclusion about Webster's construction.
5 Clifford Leech, John Webster, p. 35.
The image of the goddess Fortuna is a common enough Renaissance image, but in this speech Webster makes it function in two ways. The image sets up the idea of the capriciousness of fortune, an idea which recurs through the play as fortune thwart the plans of the manipulator, Flamineo (or so he believes); the image also says something about whores, and "whore" is a word applied to Vittoria throughout the play.

Lodovico next comments on powerful enemies, enemies, the audience is told by Gasparo, of princely rank. The antagonists of the play are of princely rank: Monticelso, a prince of the church, and Francisco, a prince of the state. The image that Lodovico uses to refer to puissant enemies is "wolves," (8) predators. Yet only the poor, he says, are treated like wolves; the wealthy prey with impunity. Lodovico's next image is that of thunder, another attribute of those who have wealth and position. Lodovico is, of course, being ironic when he says that the powerful are adored by those whom they crush; but there is also a note of envy, envy shared by Flamineo and Vittoria in the form of ambition. Flamineo, Vittoria and Lodovico are, however, ultimately "pasht in peeces" (12) by the thunderers. Antonelli responds to Lodovico that "You are justly dom'd" (13); the use of the word doomed is an example of dramatic irony, for Lodovico is literally doomed though Antonelli doesn't know it. The imagery in the next speeches of Gasparo and Antonelli continues to set the mood for the action which is to follow. The sickness of the society is suggested in
Have swallowed you like Mummia, and being sicke
With such unnatural and horrid Phisicke
Vomit you up in the kennell. (16-18)

Then the references to drunkenness, caviar and the eating of
the phoenix continue the picture of the prodigality of these
people. Still another example of the foreshadowing imagery
is the "idle Meteor...soone lost ith aire." (25) The meteoric
rise of Vittoria and her brother Flamineo is soon lost.
Antonelli's speech in which there are images of fruit-bearing
trees and of perfume suggests the love of Vittoria and Brachiano,
but Lodovico's language at the end of the scene sets the mood
for the violence to come: "Ile make Italian cut-works in their
guts"; (51) "I have seene some ready to be executed" (53) and
"Great men sell sheep thus, to be cut in peeces." (61) One
final important image remains. Lodovico says "Leave your
painted comforts." (50) These words are indicative of the
conflict between appearance and reality that is implicit in
the play; throughout The White Devil actions and characters
are not what they seem.

Next, there is the characterization of Lodovico given
in the scene. It is not unusual for a minor character to
open a Renaissance play, but Lodovico is an important minor
character. Ultimately, he is to be the avenger who kills the
major characters; hence he functions as chief resolving agent.
However, after opening the play, he very nearly drops out of
sight until he reappears as the avenger at the end. He is
characterized both by his own words and by those of his two
henchmen, Antonelli and Gasparo, as a wastrel and a ruffian,
having been a part of "certain Murders...Bloody and full of
horror."\(^7\) (21-22) This characterization makes credible Lodovico's role of tool-villain, a conventional character in the tragedy of revenge. The stoicism of Lodovico at his death in the last act and his malcontent psychology also fit the pattern of the revenger. In order to make the character of Lodovico function as tool-villain, Webster had to alter the descriptions that he found in the sources.\(^8\) Actually, Lodovico was an Orsini, a relative of Brachiano's. But he was a known murderer and an outlaw (hence, perhaps, Webster's later reference to him as a pirate). And it was he who murdered the historical Vittoria as she knelt in prayer; this he (with the aid of some fifty confederates) did after he had lost a legal battle with her over the disposition of the dead Duke's estate. Webster has improved the motivation for Lodovico's evil by simplifying it.

Finally, there are Antonelli and Gasparo. Both of these minor characters function as resolving agents and in this scene as commentators on the actions and character of Lodovico. As John Russell Brown has pointed out in the introduction to his edition of The White Devil,\(^9\) the action of the

\(^7\) The quick characterization of Lodovico is given in a manner that Webster used fairly often: two characters bracket a third in binaural bombardment. Lodovico and Gasparo do this to Brachiano in this play (V,3), and Ferdinand and the Cardinal subject the Duchess to this kind of treatment in The Duchess of Malfi (I,1).

\(^8\) The most thorough treatment of the possible and probable sources of the play is in Gunnar Boklund, The Sources of the White Devil.

\(^9\) P. xlvi.
play always has a commentator and the dialogue moves from individual feelings to generalizations through the use of the commentators. Antonelli and Gasparo serve this chorus-like function in the first scene.

This has been a somewhat lengthy consideration of a rather brief scene. The first scene of the play is neither one of emotional impact nor of moving power; however, it is dramaturgically sound, furnishing the audience exposition, motivation and characterization and setting the mood of the play.

In the second scene of the first act, the main characters, except for the antagonists, make their first appearances; consequently there is more characterization, which can be considered part of the exposition. But there is also Vittoria's relation to Brachiano of her dream, the dream which, when put into action, is the exciting force for the revenge. In this scene, then, with Flamineo's duping of Camillo and the tryst between Vittoria and Brachiano, the complications of the plot begin. It is a scene which, in its beginning, changes the rapid pace of the opening scene. The pace is slowed down, Ellis-Fermor points out, by the speeches of characterization and prologue.10

The first three speeches of the scene give an idea of the setting and indicate to the audience who the characters are. Brachiano's "Quite Lost, Flamineo," (3) in addition to

10 Una Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama: An Interpretation, p. 34.
identifying Flamineo, is an ironic line in keeping with Webster's theme of the difference between appearance and reality. Brachiano intends that his suit to Vittoria is lost; actually he is soon to gain his objective, which victory will cause him to lose honor, good name and even life.

The character of Flamineo is the first to begin to take shape in the scene. As he whispers to Brachiano that a meeting has been arranged with Vittoria, the audience sees that he is an intriguer, a Machiavel in the revenge tradition. In this tradition, the Machiavel is often a malcontent, one of the types of melancholy man defined by Theodore Spencer. "The malcontent is a malcontent because he is, or thinks himself to be displaced from the social order." He cannot be contented; he speaks bluntly, thereby gaining a reputation for honesty but also indicating his villainy. This, then is the stock character that Flamineo fits, a manipulator but honest enough to serve as chorus, one of his main functions. (As a Machiavel, he also


13 There is no unanimity among critics of the play concerning Flamineo's function as chorus though most think that he does have this choric function. Among those who hold this
functions as a complicating agent.) Webster did not have far to go from his source in the creation of Flamineo. Among the several brothers that the historical Vittoria had were a Flamineo and a Marcello. But historically, Marcello was the evil one, the intriguer who was in the service of Brachiano. Webster switched their names. The only apparent reason for this change, it seems, is that Flamineo is a more appropriate name for the fiery young man in the play. He is "...well named: nurtured in a wicked society, he accepts his precarious place in it, but his personality flames." 14 And

view are Bogard (The Tragic Satire, p. 61), Bradbrook (Themes and Conventions, p. 193) and Knight (The Golden Labyrinth, p. 104); however Dent (John Webster’s Borrowings, pp. 28-31) expounds the idea that Flamineo is not a chorus character. A way to reconcile the difference between these two views is not to consider the chorus to be the dramatist’s mouthpiece. The chorus is a character from the main action who comments on the action, giving the viewpoint that the dramatist wants the audience to bear in mind while witnessing the action; this character maintains the proper balance between, to use Ellis-Permor’s words, "manifest evil and immanent good" (The Frontiers of Drama, p. 132). There are other apparent disagreements among critics which can be resolved. Many critics, for example, consider Flamineo a type; however Ball and Parrott (A Short View of Elizabethan Drama, pp. 226-7) talk of Webster’s creation of individuals, not types. Bowers (Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, p. 181) points out that Flamineo is a tool-villain, but not simply that; he has vitality, therefore is, it might be said, an individualized type. Still other differences do not lend themselves to easy solutions: Bowers says that Brachiano is not evil; Bogard calls Brachiano an evil man. One wishes that, like Webster, one could dismiss the matter with a catch phrase: non fa caso, perhaps. It is the present writer’s opinion that Bowers’ view of Flamineo is the best one. Flamineo is the Machiavel-malcontent type of the revenge tradition, but he has some individual characteristics as well. For example, he does suffer a twinge of conscience and he is defeated by a more complete Machiavel, Francisco.

Webster puns on the name when Flamineo says of himself "A flaming firebrand oasts more smoke without a chimney, then within't." (V, 4, 41-42).

As Flamineo's dialogue with Brachiano continues, the fact that Flamineo already has a plan to bring together his sister and his master becomes evident. Lodovico's reference to "close pandarisme" in the first scene is made clear; Flamineo is acting as pandar for his sister. The dialogue further gives Webster the opportunity to develop the idea of deceptive appearances as Flamineo instructs the Duke on the hypocrisy and deceit of women. Women, he tells Brachiano, appear chaste and modest so that they will be more wanted by men; but once a man has won a woman, her supposed charms quickly cloy and he wishes to be rid of her. Not only, then, does Webster have Flamineo discuss the duplicity of women, but also he implies duplicity through Flamineo's action. The pandar would arrange the affair for the Duke while admitting that it is worthless, for the Duke will soon tire of his sister, he thinks.

Camillo, the husband of Vittoria, is then introduced. Flamineo has already described him as a fool and weakling. He lives up to this description in the course of his dialogue with his brother-in-law. Although he suspects Brachiano of lusting after Vittoria, and although he doubts his wife's fidelity, he is easily taken in by Flamineo's machinations. Despite the fact that he cannot remember the last time that he slept with his wife (for she had not permitted him the freedom of her quarters), Camillo agrees to his brother-in-
law's plan to give Vittoria complete freedom so that she will not cuckold him. During the course of the dialogue, there are double entendres and much discussion of cuckolding, again indicating the double nature of women who appear to be chaste but who are not. The conversation turns, then, to talk of jealousy and the ills that it can bring. The jealous man, Flamineo says, sees things much worse than they really are, just as the jealous Brachiano is misled later by Francisco's letter to Vittoria. When Vittoria enters (I. 112), the double nature of the action becomes even more pronounced. First, Flamineo, who has planted the seed of desire in Brachiano by praising his sister, denigrates her attractions to Camillo. Then while supposedly interceding for Camillo with Vittoria, through a series of asides to her Flamineo insults his brother-in-law and assures his sister that her assignation with Brachiano will take place. Webster creates here double action in Camillo's thinking that he is being helped while his cuckolding is being arranged. And Flamineo's comments on Camillo are apparently honest; this is the view of Camillo that Webster wants the audience to hold. The imagery in Flamineo's speeches emphasizes the stupidity and low station of Camillo (as compared to the station of the great Duke of Brachiano) and also emphasizes the false appearances e.g. "flaw" (56 and 57) and the bowling images (66-68).

It is interesting to note that in one of Flamineo's speeches about a husband's being played false, there is an allusion to a contemporary English problem, land enclosures (II. 95-97). Webster occasionally brings in topical allusions in this way.
of people. Camillo, he says, is a wretch who "when he weares white sattin one would take him by his blacke mussel to be no other creature then a maggot."¹⁷ (136-37) And Vittoria is "a goodly Foile...but covered with a false stone, yon conterfaite dyamond."¹⁸ (138-39) By the time Camillo departs, he has agreed to lock himself in his room and to give Flamineo the key. Except for his appearance in the dumb show (II,2), this is the last the audience sees of Camillo, a complicating agent whom Webster depicts as a kind of stock gull and cuckold character. Webster had little to go on in depicting Camillo, for he is not well described in the sources; therefore it is of little matter that this minor character is conventinal. Historically, the first husband of Vittoria was named Francesco Peretti. Peretti's mother, the sister of Cardinal Montalto, was named Camilla. In order to avoid confusion between Vittoria's husband in the play and Francisco, Duke of Florence, Webster changed the name to the masculine version of the name of the actual mother.

Immediately after Camillo's exit, Brachiano enters. At this point in the play, Brachiano's interest in Vittoria seems to be largely infatuation, lust. He scarcely knows her. But the attachment grows during the course of the play to real love and need.

¹⁷ Webster again uses imagery of lower animals in referring to Camillo when Camillo makes an analogy between himself and a silkworm and Flamineo repeats the image after Camillo departs. ¹⁸ The latter part of this speech is, as Lucas points out (I, 210, n. 138), another double entendre.
The duke is drawn throughout in reference to Vittoria; he seems to have no existence except in relation to her. He is, however, no mere effect or reflection of her power, for his dramatic character undergoes a visible and rational growth within the narrow compass of the play.\footnote{W. W. Greg, "Webster's White Devil," p. 117.}

The character of the Duke develops in somewhat the same way as does the character of the tragic hero in Renaissance tragedy although the Duke does not meet the dignified death of a tragic hero. Here is a man of high position who, through a flaw in his nature (allowing his passion to over-rule his reason), is brought down. But he is not the hero of the play though he and Vittoria are very nearly co-protagonists. The play is about her; Brachiano is the main complicating agent in the plot. Webster changed little in the Brachiano who appears in the sources. The Duke is described in the sources as a not unattractive man but enormously corpulent.\footnote{Lucas notes that Brachiano was so heavy that it was difficult to find a horse that could carry him. (Lucas, I, 73).}

Webster omits the Duke's obesity, perhaps to make more credible Vittoria's love for him. Historically, the romance of Vittoria and Brachiano lasted for some time; they were married three times in attempts to have the Pope recognize them as man and wife. Webster compresses the action for dramatic purpose; only a limited amount of action can be depicted on the stage in a given period.

The tryst begins with, as Lucas points out, the lovers probably in the inner stage, if there were an inner stage, Flamineo and Zanche downstage and Cornelia, perhaps partially...
hidden by a hanging, across the stage from her son and the Moor. In one of Vittoria's early lines in this piece of action, an image is used which prefigures the future action. When Brachiano compliments her on her mercy and calls her "sweet Phisition," she responds that "a loathed crueltie in ladyes/Is as to Doctors many funeralls." (199-201) Ironically, she is not cruel, but many deaths ensue from her kindness. After a comment from Flamineo on the success of his endeavor, Cornelia laments, in terms of natural catastrophes, this blot upon the honor of her family. Next there is the exchange of jewels passage with a play upon the word jewel both in its usual sense and in the sense of "chastity" or "the honor of a married woman." Then Vittoria begins to relate to Brachiano her dream, a symbolic plan for the murders of their respective spouses. In the dream there is a pun on yew, the graveyard tree, also to be taken as "you," Brachiano. Finally, Brachiano saves her in the dream by killing her husband and his wife. The dream, as dreams often are, is not exactly clear in rational detail; but the idea certainly is and the language of the grave is appropriate. And should the point of this dream have been lost on the audience, Flamineo repeats it very clearly (246-8). He opens this speech by calling his sister an "Excellent Divell," the first reference to her in the play as a devil; and here, as in the title of the play, the attributive is contradictory of the word it modifies, devil.

21 Ibid., 212, n. 192.
Brachiano's next speech is important for its ironic foreshadowings. He tells Vittoria that the dream means that he is to protect her from her jealous husband and from his wife. Although she does not need protection from these two inoffensive creatures, she needs protection which Brachiano cannot give from those who would avenge the deaths of Camillo and Isabella. The Duke continues that he will set her above law and above scandal, yet Vittoria is haled into court and her reputation is utterly destroyed. Although he says that government will not divide them (that is, his governing), another government, that of the Church, does divide.

Cornelia then breaks the lovers' spell with her dire prophecy, "Woe to light hearts! — they still forerun our fall!" (259). The exchange which follows between Cornelia and her son Flamineo contains images of poison, witchcraft and decay — "meltew on a flower," "poysoned herbes" "a nursery for witch-craft" and "a burriall plot." (264-67) These images come immediately before Cornelia's revealing to the Duke that his Duchess, Isabella, is there in Rome. Cornelia then offers one of the many sententia with which the play abounds:

The lives of Princes should like dyals move,  
Whose regular example is so strong,  
They make the times by them go right or wrong. (279-81)

Webster is fond of these sententious sayings and uses them as a generalized statement of his point of view, as a device for characterization and as a way to define action.22

In this case, the saw points up what Brachiano is not doing and emphasizes the theme of courtly corruption.

Vittoria finally replies to her mother's accusations, pointing out that she has been passive while Brachiano has been aggressive. This attitude makes Vittoria appear somewhat less culpable, an appearance Webster desires in order that the audience will sympathize with her. She defends herself by saying

I do protest if any chast denial,
If any thing but bloud could have alayed
His long suite to me... (283-85)

Blood, of course, finally does allay the affair. And curiously one of Vittoria's last lines is "O my greatest sinne lay in my blood." This echo of the earlier idea emphasizes the almost inexorable nature of the affair.

Cornelia refuses to accept her daughter's explanation and curses her:

Bee thy act Judas-like, betray in kissing --
Maiest thou be envied during his short breath
And pitied like a wretch after his death. (291-93)

The first line of this speech foreshadows the death of the Duchess who is poisoned by kissing a picture of the Duke. The rest of the speech is ironic. For this curse Brachiano blames Cornelia for any ensuing harms. He means, of course, any rupture in his plan for securing Vittoria; the harms which ensue are of an entirely different nature.

The character of Cornelia is one that Webster altered drastically from the sources. The actual mother of Vittoria, Marcello and Flamineo was Tarquinia. She was somewhat less than pleased with her daughter's first marriage and apparently

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conspired to have the husband murdered. She was ruthlessly ambitious and promoted her daughter's affair with the powerful Duke of Brachiano. The alteration of name can perhaps be accounted for by the historical associations with the name "Tarquina," associations that would have been inappropriate for the character in the play. The change in the nature of the character seems to be dictated by the fact that Webster did not need another, a female, Machiavel in the play. Another schemer would have detracted from Flamino. Therefore Webster employed the seemingly virtuous Cornelia as a commentator on the action, a chorus. Even Cornelia, though, hides some self-concern behind her goodness. Were she as steadfast in condemning adultery as she is quick in condemning it, she would not have gone to Brachiano's palace with the sinners.

The first act closes with a dialogue between Flamino and his mother. This dialogue furnishes further exposition in that it tells something of Flamino's background, information which helps the audience to understand his melancholic character. He was a destitute student, having received no inheritance; he went to the Duke's court where he learned courtesy and lechery; now nothing could shame him. After insulting his mother by wishing that she'd been a whore ("...those children/Plurality of Fathers -- they are sure/They shall not want." [331-32]), he advises her to take her

23 This is the view of life at court expounded throughout the play.
complaints to the Cardinal, a character who appears almost immediately to open the second act. The act closes with Flamireo giving a brief soliloquy on the art of the Machiavel:

The way ascends not straight, but Imitates
The suttles fouldings of a Winter's snake,
So who knowes policy and her true aspect,
Shall find her waies winding and indirect. (345-48)

Flamireo's speech closing out the first act serves as a splendid introduction to the second. The audience still has in mind the image of policy as a snake when the master of policy, Francisco, slithers on stage. In this scene the rest of the characters are introduced; these characters, for the most part, compose the antagonists' side of the conflict in the play. In addition to Francisco de Medici, the Duke of Florence, who is the chief antagonist, the audience also sees for the first time Cardinal Monticelso, Isabella, Marcello, and Giovanni. The rising action of the plot continues with the complications ensuing from Brachiano's affair with Vittoria being made clear.

Isabella, the wife of Brachiano, is the first characterized in this scene. The short speech she has before her first exit tells the audience much about her character. She entreats her brother, Francisco, to be gentle with her husband, for she forgives Brachiano for whatever wrongs she has been done by him. But it should be noted that the imagery of the speech ironically foretells her own death. Her arms will, she says, "charme his poyson" (17); his poison comes, however, unexpectedly. Isabella is mild, perhaps bland; the contrast between her and the beautiful, forceful, appealing Vittoria...
is obvious. Isabella offers nothing but sweetness, cloying sweetness. In the character of Isabella Webster made the greatest alteration of character from sources to play. The historical Isabella was a wanton, frequently involved in extra-marital affairs, her last one being with a kinsman of her husband's. So bad did her behavior finally become that her husband, with her brother's knowledge and approval, had her murdered to prevent any further blackening of the families' names. The change in Isabella was necessary in order that the conflict be better motivated and the revenge more credible. Further, Webster's Isabella serves as a foil to Vittoria, Isabella's flat personality heightening by contrast Vittoria's desirability.

The scene continues with the confrontation between, on the one hand, Brachiano and on the other, Monticelso and Francisco. Some of the imagery of this part of the scene is important, for it implies again the foreshadowing of an event and continues the mood of the play. Monticelso implies the use of poison when he talks of "...the sting/Plac't in the Adders tayle" (38) and then continues with another image when he tells Francisco that "...ther's Hemlocke in thy breath." (61) The argument between Brachiano and Francisco becomes increasingly acrimonious, despite the Cardinal's attempts at pacification, until the breach is temporarily healed by the entrance of Giovanni. But before the entrance of the boy, there is another mention of poison (72), and another brief speech of Brachiano's just before the reference to poison is indicative of his attitude toward his wife.
The Medici tells Brachiano that Isabella would have been better off given to death than in marriage to him. Brachiano responds, "Thou hadst given a soule to God then." (69) As Lucas points out, judging from the acrimony of Brachiano’s preceding and following speeches, the audience would assume this to be a slurring remark about Isabella's saintliness. (And the actor should deliver the line with the proper venomous insinuation.) In this play, Isabella is undeniably a good woman, too full of goodness for Brachiano. The audience is, in fact, made to feel that marriage to Isabella might be an experience considerably less than rewarding, that Brachiano's choice of Vittoria is a reasonable one. And Vittoria's husband is hopelessly banal; therefore her choice of Brachiano is reasonable. By making these sharp contrasts, Webster gains the sympathy of the audience for a protagonist whose actions are difficult to justify on moral grounds.

The character of Francisco isn't mentioned in the sources of the play in connection with the Vittoria-Brachiano affair. Webster has created him as the arch-Machiavel, as Greg suggests, as the guiding force of the play. It might even be said that Francisco is a sort of personification of fortune, the fortune mentioned throughout the play. It is

24 Lucas, I, 215-16.
25 One need not go quite so far as Bradbrook in saying that the adultery seems right (Themes and Conventions, p. 190); it seems understandable.
26 Greg, 116.
he whose function is chief antagonist and whose plotting brings about the revenge. Further, in his diabolical machinations against Vittoria, he illustrates the corruption of courts, about which Webster so often has his characters speak.

The Cardinal also functions as an antagonist, but Webster seems to make sure that he doesn't compete with Francisco as the chief architect of Vittoria's downfall. In the source, Monticelso is Montalto and becomes Pope Sixtus V. Webster's changes in the names appear to be somewhat gratuitous.\(^\text{27}\) But the character of the historical Montalto fits well in the play. He was known to be crafty, politic; he was called by his predecessor on the Papal throne a hypocrite. The double nature then, cunning and policy disguised in the trappings of religion, is there for Webster to use.

The boy plays little part in the drama. There is another somewhat inexplicable change in name from Virginio in the sources to Giovanni in the play.\(^\text{28}\) Virginio was a child of about eight at the time of the action of the play; this age would fit the character in the play well enough. The child, dressed for soldiering and talking of leading troops, is precocious in the manner of many children depicted on the

\(^{27}\) For conjectures about the changes, see Greg, p. 115 and Lucas, I, 90.

\(^{28}\) Lucas suggests that Webster might have changed the name because Virginio Orsini was still living in 1612. (Lucas, I, 90.)
stage in Webster's time; he is something of a stock character. His main function is that of resolving agent as he metes out punishment to the avengers in the last act.

The first scene of the second act continues with the interview between Brachiano and his wife; the audience sees that the reconciling of Brachiano and his brother-in-law cannot last long, for Orsini does not intend to be reconciled with Isabella. Brachiano purposely misconstrues her words implying that her "devotion" (to him) means spiritual devotion. (153-4) He then accuses her of jealousy, an emotion of which he is to be guilty. Brachiano's end is foreshadowed in Isabella's words "these young Frownes/Shew, in a Helmet, lovely,..." (171-2) for his murder becomes more certain with each step he takes away from his wife. In the course of his diatribe against his wife and her brother, Brachiano characterizes the double nature of Francisco:

...all his reverent wit
Lies in his wardrobe, he's a discrete fellow
When he's made up in his robes of state -- (187-9)

Brachiano's abuse of his wife and of her family culminates with his cursing the priest who joined them and cursing their child. He ends the abusive speech by swearing that their marriage is ended. This ironic swearing of divorce on a

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29 See Lucas, I, 218, n. 128. Lucas also points out possible parallels between Giovanni and young Prince Henry.

30 This is the first of the four parodies of sacred services that are identified by James R. Hurt, "Inverted Rituals in Webster's The White Devil." JEGP, LXXI (1962), 42-47. This and lines 254-261 are, he says, parodies of the wedding service; there also are parodies of the office of confession (IV, 3, 109-51) and of the rite of extreme unction (V, 3, 146-71).
wedding ring initiates some double action in which even the virtuous Isabella participates, taking on a false appearance. She tells her brother and the Cardinal that she renounces her husband, using almost the same words that he has just used in divorcing her. Her vitriolic comments on Vittoria, however, are perhaps only partly for appearance sake. Surely Isabella must be rather less than fond of her husband's mistress, but her intemperate language is harsher than the mild Isabella would be expected to use. Isabella exits with an aphorism that is both a choric comment on her condition and a Renaissance commonplace. "'Undkindnesse do thy office, poore heart breake,/'Those are killing griefes which dare not speake." (278-79)

The next action in the scene is the giving of Camillo his commission by Francisco and Monticelso. Flamineo's speech on how he will use this act to advantage is another speech full of imagery of poison. He talks of "Stibium" and "Cantorides." (285) After the entrance of the doctor, the imagery turns to sickness, suffering and death. Flamineo abuses the doctor outrageously, calling him, among other things, quack, lecher, poisoner and toad. The doctor denies nothing, for which Brachiano calls him "honest." (308) And honest he is for Brachiano's purpose; the Duke has need of an adept poisoner. The scene closes with Francisco and Monticelso explaining to Camillo his mission; but after

31 John Russell Brown, in his edition of the play (Cambridge, Mass., 1960, p. 1vi), characterizes Isabella as "...hiding self-concern behind an appearance of goodness...."
Vittoria's doltish husband leaves, the Machiavels enlighten the audience about their real reasons for sending Camillo away. It is another double action, seeming different from what it really is. Francisco and the Cardinal hope that in the absence of Camillo they will be able to trap Brachiano with Vittoria and force him back to Isabella. Even the Cardinal's nephew is used.

The second scene of Act II is taken up largely by the dumb show. Brachiano has employed a conjurer to show him the deaths of Isabella and Camillo. This bit of stage business had had a long tradition on the English stage and was the kind of thing that audiences appreciated. (It acts more impressively than it reads.) As Lucas points out, the device of the dumb show is the romantic version of the classical Nuntius and somewhat more effective than the messenger.\(^{32}\)

The method of death of the historical Isabella is unknown though it is suspected that she was strangled by her husband. The method in the play is more dramatic and is in the revenge tradition.\(^{33}\) It is also brought out that Lodovico is one of those attending the Duchess as she kisses the poisoned picture, thereby keeping the revenger involved in the proceedings. Webster has also changed the method of murdering

\(^{32}\) Lucas, I, 223. It is noted by J. R. Mulryne ("The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi," Jacobean Theater, New York, 1960, p. 203) that enacting the murders in dumb show puts them at a distance from the sympathy of the audience and lessens the pity that the audience might otherwise feel for Isabella.

Camillo. Actually, Vittoria’s husband was shot on a street in Rome, gangland style. The place of his execution was Monte Cavallo. Perhaps from this name Webster got the idea of the vaulting horse. In fact, having Flamineo kill Camillo in this way is quite appropriate. First, it appears to be an accident. Second, the deceptive appearance is compounded by the fact that Camillo is exercising for fun and physical profit when he is slain. So his death is, as is the death of Isabella from kissing the poisoned picture of her husband, one in which the end comes unexpectedly when something quite different was expected. The scene ends with another of the sententiae, this one being a chorus-like comment by the conjurer on the great harms done by great men.

Act II is one of rising action. The complications begin to occur, but the protagonists still have the advantage though the antagonists rise briefly when it appears that Giovanni will reconcile the strife. In Act III the fortunes of the antagonists begin to ascend.

At the opening of the third act, the audience finds that Vittoria is to be arraigned before an ecclesiastical court. This news the audience learns from Francisco; the real reason for the proceedings it gets from Monticelso. The Cardinal says that they have only circumstantial evidence against Vittoria in the death of her husband; but by having all of the foreign ambassadors present, they can "...make her infamous/To all our neighbouring Kingdomes." (7-8) The antagonists have, then, little hope of convicting Vittoria of murder; they want only to ruin her reputation by proving
her lustful and, if possible, to convict her of adultery.
The comment by Francisco that he does not expect Brachiano
assumes some importance in the second scene.

In the second part of the scene there is a further
contrast of Marcello and Flamineo, both of whom are being
detained by the authorities. The several ambassadors are
also introduced to the audience in this scene. Flamineo
banter with the lawyer, playing on words and phrases (to
the amusement of the audience, no doubt), then comments in
an aside that he is appearing to be mirthful in order to
quiet suspicion. Again, appearances are deceiving; for
Flamineo goes on to give his brother, who is grieving at
their sister's conduct, his usual misanthropic view of life:
the weak are always at the mercy of their powerful masters
and therefore should attempt to please. In contrast, Marcello
says that all actions should be governed by virtue and good-
ness, a point of view of which his brother will never be
convinced. The scene ends with Flamineo making further
off-color and depreciating remarks, this time about the
arriving ambassadors. The function of the scene is two-fold:
not only does it further characterize the brothers of Vittoria,
but it also leads into the more important arraignment scene
through Flamineo's double-entendres (Vittoria's accusers
concentrate on her libidinousness) and through the lawyer's
implication that in the minds of all, Vittoria is already
convicted of prostituting herself.

The second scene of the third act is one of the most
important in the play, for in it the audience has its first
real view of Vittoria occupying the center stage, dominating the action. For this reason, the discussion of the character of the protagonist has been postponed to this point. It has been said, in fact, that this scene reveals all of the evils of the play.\textsuperscript{34} The first scene was probably played on the outer stage; after Flamineo's last words closing the scene, the curtains were drawn on the inner stage revealing all of the principals plus Zanche, Marcell, the lawyers, the ambassadors and some guards. The fact that Brachiano has unexpectedly appeared causes some confusion among the prosecutors and judge because there is no place prepared for him. This confusion continues throughout the scene as Vittoria manages always to reason better than they and to present her case better than they present the case against her. The lawyer opens the proceedings against Vittoria -- in Latin. She, caring for her public image, objects that many will not understand this tongue; and she wins this first point. The lawyer continues in English, but his jargon is ludicrous. Again Vittoria objects to the language and again she scores; Francisco scornfully dismisses the lawyers. The initial damage has been done, however, to the antagonists; they have been made to look foolish because of their ridiculous attorney.

Monticelso next takes up the examination and accuses Vittoria, saying he will paint her follies in more natural colors than the red of her cheeks, implying still another form

\footnote{34} H. Bruce Franklin, "The Trial Scene of Webster's The White Devil Examined in Terms of Renaissance Rhetoric," \textit{SEL}, \textbf{1} (Spring, 1961), 35-51.
of deception: the augmenting of natural beauty by cosmetics. Her response is a good example of the spirited defense she makes throughout the trial:

O you mistake.
You raise a blood as noble in this cheek
As ever was your mothers. (56-8)

The Cardinal's next speech emphasizes the double nature of Vittoria through an allusion: she is like the fruit which appears to be beautiful but which, when touched, will "fall to soote and ashes." (70) In his next speech, the Cardinal refers to Vittoria as a devil, another one of many such references in the play. To this Vittoria responds by commenting on the falsity of the clergy, even the highest ranks of the clergy: "O poore charity! Thou art seldom found in scarlet." (73-4) Again Monticelso calls her a whore to which Vittoria answers, "Ha? whore -- what's that?" (81) Apparently the sense of Vittoria's question is "What do you mean by that?" Or perhaps she means, "What did you say?" But the Cardinal intentionally misunderstands her to mean "What’s a whore?" He then launches into an excellent example (in verse) of the seventeenth century literary genre, the Character.35 The speech contains many disparate images, some of them topical (alchemy, taxes, law, dissection of corpses) and ends with a comparison of a whore to a counterfeit coin, again emphasizing the gap between appearance and reality. To the Cardinal's long diatribe (24 lines), Vittoria simply comments "This

35 This "Character of a Whore" speech is additional evidence supporting the theory that Webster was a contributor to the Overburian "Character."
character scapes me." (105) Her quiet responses to the railing accusations of her antagonist build up her character and gain for her the sympathy of the audience. For when the Cardinal next accuses her of being full of poison and the French Ambassador says that she has lived a bad life, the English Ambassador, who could be expected to give the English (i.e. the audience) point of view says "Trew, but the Cardinals too bitter." (111) Webster has, by Vittoria's conduct and by such comments as this, gained the sympathy of the audience for his protagonist.

He continues to build his heroine's character by having her continue to outsmart her antagonists. When Francisco says that her unhappy husband is dead, she replies that he is now happy because his debt to nature is paid. And even when the Duke of Florence and the Cardinal join forces to pair accusations (one of Webster's favorite devices, as was pointed out earlier), she is not cowed. They accuse her of being an accessory to her husband's murder and of not even bearing the proper mein of mourning, to which she answers, "Had I forknowne his death as you suggest, I would have bespoke my mourning." (126-7) She shows her courage again by telling the court that she does not fear death and will not beg any man for life. Again Webster gives to the English Ambassador the line of commentary which best sums up Vittoria's character: "Shee hath a brave spirit." (144)

The idea of false appearances continues in the next speech, but this time it is Vittoria who uses it after she is again called a counterfeit.
These are but faigned shadowes of my evels. 
Terrify babes, my lord, with painted devils, 
I am past needlesse palsy -- for your names, 
of Whore and Murdresse they proceed from you, 
As if a man should spit against the wind, 
The filth returne's in's face. (150-5)

She will be neither deceived nor frightened by appearances, 
for actions often turn out to be the opposite of their expectations. In the world of this play, actions frequently bring unlooked-for results.

The piece of action which follows Vittoria's speech takes the emphasis from her and places it on Brachiano in order further to build his character. Monticelso asks Vittoria who spent the night of her husband's murder in her home. Brachiano quickly answers that it was he, that he had spent the night there in order to comfort the widow and to advise her on settling her husband's estate. Brachiano's unhesitant admission shows him to be without fear of the censure of Francisco and of Monticelso. In this public defense of Vittoria, he indicates also his love for her, for he would not risk compromising himself for some woman for whom he had no regard. The bitter argument that follows between Brachiano and the Cardinal is quite like the earlier argument between Brachiano and Francisco. Vittoria's lover haughtily leaves, having overcome Monticelso in the verbal battle.

After the departure of Orsini, Francisco seems to relent in saying that he thinks that Vittoria was not an accomplice in her husband's murder. Just how much the politic Duke has relented, the audience sees later. In moving the accusation that Vittoria is Brachiano's mistress, Monticelso presents a
letter from Brachiano to her in which the Duke has attempted to arrange an assignation. Vittoria says that she refused the appointment and defends herself with another of her excellent speeches:

Summe up my faults I pray, and you shall finde,
That beauty and gay clothes, a merry heart,
And a good stomake to a feast, are all,
All the poore crime that you can charge me with;
Infaith my Lord you might go pistoll flyes,
The sport would be more noble. (215-220)

Her superiority in verbal fencing continues: when the Cardinal again calls her a devil in disguise, she laconically responds, "You have one vertue left,/You will not flatter me." (226-7)

Finally, Vittoria suggests that there is no justice in one man's playing both her accuser and judge. "Give in your evidence 'gainst me, and let these/Be moderators:" she says. (235-6) At this turn, the Cardinal has had enough. He knows that he must be judge; therefore he speeds through his accusation again, but this time it has become the judgment. After dismissing Flamineo and Marcello, he sentences Vittoria to the house of convertîtes, a house, he explains of penitent whores. He will have no part of allowing disinterested men to pass judgment on her.37

Briefly, now, Vittoria loses control and becomes angry and abusive. Her remark about the erection of the house is,

36 Here, it would seem, Vittoria gestures toward the assembled ambassadors. Like most attractive women, she has great confidence in her ability to charm men.

37 In the course of delivering his sentence, Monticelso mentions the bawd, thereby greatly unnerving Flamineo who, though he can keep up appearances, does not have the inward assurance and aplomb of the true Machiavel.
perhaps, a **double-entendre**; if so, it is the first time that she has indulged in this sort of word play. As she is seized to be led out, she angrily cries that justice has been raped and curses the Cardinal, swearing vengeance against him. (Ironically, it is the Duke of Florence who is really her greater enemy; but Vittoria is deceived by the appearances.) But before being led away, she regains her composure. She speaks coolly and bitingly, without loud railing:

> For since you cannot take my life for deeds,  
> Take it for words -- 'tis woman's poor revenge  
> Which dwells but in the tongue -- I will not weep,  
> No I do scorn to call up one poor tear  
> To fawn on your injustice -- bear me hence,  
> Unto this house of -- what's your mitigating title?  
> MON. Of converts.  
> VIT. It shall not be a house of converts --  
> My mind shall make it honest to me  
> Then the Popes Palace, and more peaceable  
> Then thy soul, though thou art a Cardinal --  
> Know this, and let it somewhat raise your spight,  
> Through darkness Diamonds spread their richest light.  

(293-305)

These words again show the audience Vittoria's spirit and her superiority, mental and apparently moral, to her accusers. As she is led out, the audience is left with the image of Vittoria as the bright spot, the diamond shining in the darkness around her.

Webster has adeptly revealed the character of his protagonist gradually. The audience sees Vittoria first only rather briefly in a scene in which at first the focus is on Flamineo. Here she is rather quiet, almost passive, as her husband is duped by her brother. She asks only how they will be rid of Camillo. But after the foolish Camillo is taken care of, the audience sees her charm Brachiano. She is clever in her handling of this great prince, slyly suggesting.
the murders of the spouses to him. But when her mother accuses her of infidelity to her husband and condemns her, Vittoria quietly resumes her rôle of passivity. Then for an entire act the audience does not see her. When she returns, new dimensions are added. Her spirit and intelligence become foremost in Act III. She is not only beautiful and desirable but also proud, courageous and rational. Despite what she has done to Isabella, to her husband, to anyone else, Webster has made her sympathetic and somehow admirable. Yet Vittoria is the White Devil, beautiful but wicked, the embodiment of the deception of appearances, a perfect protagonist for a play dealing with the question of appearances versus reality.

The changes that Webster made in Vittoria from sources to play are slight. Most of the essential facts are the same, but Webster has skillfully handled his character building so that Vittoria is a sympathetic character and so that her downfall is moving.

The scene quietly comes to a close with Francisco's learning of the death of his sister. Inasmuch as she dies in Padua, it is logical that it would be a few days before the news reaches him in Rome.

After building to a climax with the arraignment of Vittoria, then gradually lowering the emotional tone at the end of the second scene, Webster offers a sharp contrast with Scene iii, Flamineo's mad scene. As the others troop mournfully off, Flamineo enters "as distracted." Madness, both real and feigned, is conventional in the drama of this period. The effect is sometimes humorous as is seen in some of the exchanges.
between Flamineo and Lodovico. Flamineo's madness is, of course, feigned; he has stated in the previous scene that, unable to counterfeit sorrow for the death of the Duchess, he will "...for a time appeare a politioke mad-man." (318-19)

Once more, then, this time with madness making it dramatically effective, there is a case of appearance differing from reality, and Flamineo in his second speech of the scene calls attention to the difference in his comment on his sister's condemnation.

Oh they have wrought their purpose cunningly, as if They would not seeme to doe it by malice. In this a Politition imitates the devill, as the devill imitates a canon.
Wheresoever he comes to doe mischiefe, he comes with his Backside towards you. (13-17)

The imagery of the scene emphasizes Flamineo's antic madness: he talkes of maggots and flies, of being lousy, of tortures and punishments, of dunghills and poisons. He rants, but in his ranting he mentions some common grievances of the time: usury, multiple benefices for clergymen and new-made noblemen. The scene ends with the news that the Pope, on his deathbed, has pardoned Lodovico. The conflict between Lodovico and Flamineo has become more personal and Lodovico is now free to work against Flamineo, Vittoria and Brachiano.

Lodovico, who opened the play with his anger and vengefulness, returns to become the instrument of revenge.

Act IV opens with the chief antagonists, Francisco and Monticelso, planning revenge. Through speeches laced with more animal imagery, the audience learns that Francisco will not attempt war against Brachiano but will try to gain his
revenge in a more devious way. He borrows the Cardinal's black book of criminals in order to find his man. Left alone to peruse this *Who's Who* of the Roman underworld, the Duke soliloquizes on the baseness of the times as reflected by the Cardinal's book. But to the audience this moralizing emphasizes Francisco's hypoorisy and duplicity. As he tries to picture his dead sister in order to strengthen his wish for revenge, her ghost appears to him. The appearance of the ghost is in the tradition of the revenge tragedy as is the style in which Francisco's speech continues. Inspired by the appearance of the apparition, the Duke initiates a plot: he will indite a love letter to Vittoria in order to cause a rift between her and Brachiano. The scene closes with another of the *sententia*, this one a comment on Francisco's view that duplicity is superior to force: the enemies will be taken in a trap.

The second scene of this act contains the turning point of the play: after Brachiano has risen to the Duke's bait and displayed his jealousy of and lack of faith in Vittoria, he proposes to make her his duchess and help her escape. The Duke has successfully set in motion the series of events that will culminate in the downfall of the lovers. According to plan, the servant of Francisco arrives with the love letter for Vittoria and sees to it that it is intercepted by her

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39 Lucas, I, 238, n. 119.
brother. The contents of the letter are revealed to Brachiano who, raging at the pandar, demands to be taken to Vittoria to confront her with this supposed evidence of her duplicity. In the brief exchange between the two men, Flamineo again reveals his Machiavel character and his chorus-like function. For example, when the furious Brachiano asks, after Flamineo has offered him violence in response to a threat, "Do you know mee?" (58), Flamineo answers

Oh my Lord! methodically,  
As in the world there are degrees of evils;  
So in the world there are degrees of devils.  
You're a great Duke; I your poor secretarie.  
I doe look now for a Spanish fig, or an Italian sallet daily. (59-63)

Flamineo's comment on the court of Brachiano is well taken and is in keeping with the theme of the corruption of great men that runs through the play. And the implication is that Vittoria is not the only devil of the play. The appearance of the great hides the corruption of their real natures. When Flamineo then leads the Duke to Vittoria, he walks backward in front of the Duke for fear of turning his back on a "Pollltique enemie." (70)

Brachiano approaches Vittoria waving the letter at her and condemning her violently. He demands to see her cache of love letters. Vittoria's innocent responses strike a chord in Flamineo who suddenly senses a plot. Taking his cue from the hawking imagery that the Duke has been using in condemning

40 Interestingly, the violence Flamineo offers the Duke is a broken neck; the audience is reminded of the manner in which Flamineo dispatched Camillo.
Vittoria, he advises the Duke to "Ware hawke,..." (84) that is to beware of a trap. Vittoria then realizes exactly what has happened and says that it is a plot. Brachiano continues to rail against her and, in a speech that is an example of Webster at his poetic best (87-93), calls her "the devil in christall!" (89) This appellation is not only a reminder of the title of the play, but it is also a clear statement of a major theme: appearances are deceiving. The Duke's whole speech, in fact, brings out this idea. As the interview between Vittoria and Brachiano progresses, she again proves herself the verbal master as she had during her arraignment. The audience sees her again alert and spirited, defending herself against the false accusation and outwitting her tormentor. To Brachiano's accusation of whoredom, she replies that it was he who had originally soiled her honor; and at precisely the right moment, she weeps or feigns weeping. The Duke is finished; he begs forgiveness. Plamineo comes to his master's aid and Vittoria begins to respond to their persuasion. With Brachiano's offer to make Vittoria his duchess, the job is done. The Duke will take his son; Vittoria and Plamineo will take their mother and brother and join Brachiano in Padua. Francisco's plan has worked; he will have his enemies all together and removed from the vicinity of

41 In the course of persuading his sister, Plamineo makes a contrast which serves well to contrast Isabella and Vittoria.

The Sea's more rough and raging than calme rivers,
But nor so sweet nor wholesome. A quiet woman
Is a still water under a great bridge.
A man may shoot her safely.

Plamineo knows Brachiano and he knows women.
the Pope. The scene closes with Flamineo's telling his relatively pointless crocodile story. Lucas sees little in the story but the hint to Brachiano that Flamineo wants a reward.42 There is perhaps a stronger hint to Vittoria that Flamineo expects a reward from her for helping to gain her the title. But the greatest significance of the crocodile story is that it gives Flamineo the opportunity to deliver the aside that ends the scene. The audience is reminded by this speech that Flamineo is still the Machiavel, still will assume any role in order to advance himself. The length to which Webster has gone, the twelve-line story, to build up to this comment is, perhaps, excessive.

The last scene of Act IV has been taken by some critics of the play to be an excellent example of Webster's ramshackle dramatic construction. W. W. Greg's comment is a good sample of this view. Greg suggests that the newly elected Pope pronounces Papal banishment against Vittoria and Brachiano, then forgets it.

It is commonly a mistake to use Jove's thunder to no purpose unless you wish to make it ridiculous. Webster may not have wished to go as far as this, and possibly thought the Pope's action would make Francisco's plot more possible, in the same manner as his supposed concurrence determines Lodovico; but the whole scene is somewhat superfluous, and retards the action of the play at a critical point.43

As a whole, the scene does have a function: the plot is furthered by Francisco's employing Lodovico as an instrument of

42 Lucas, I, 244-5, n. 225 f.
43 Greg, 115.
revenge, and Webster uses the scene as another comment on corruption and duplicity in high places.

The view of the Papal election with which the scene opens is a bit of action calculated to entice Webster's Protestant audience with its color and pageantry. And it presents a sharp contrast with the previous scene, set in the house of convertîtes. After the announcement that Monticelso has been elevated to the papacy, Francisco is informed of the flight of Vittoria and Brachiano. His response to the servant makes clear to the audience that his plan is succeeding and shows his hypocrisy as well. To the servant he says, "fled -- o damnable!" (54) But after the exit of the servants, he immediately continues

How fortunate are my wishes. Why? 'twas this
I onely laboured. I did send the letter
T'instruct him what to doe. (55-57)

The new Pope, informed by Francisco of the flight, pronounces excommunication. The Pope leaves briefly with his retinue and, during his absence, the audience learns that Francisco has many followers in Brachiano's court. When Monticelso returns, he questions Lodovico about his just-ended talk with the Duke of Florence. Not put off by Lodovico's story of talking about a horse, the Pope says, "Take you heed: Least the Jade breake your necke." (99-100) This is apparently another play on words, for "Jade" is not only a horse but also a pejorative term for woman. Lodovico is being warned not to go the way of Camillo. Lodovico's confession to the Pope furnishes further motivation for his hatred of Brachiano: he had lusted after Isabella and would avenge her death.
Though the Pope seems to weaken Lodovico's resolve for revenge, Francisco's clever contrivance makes Lodovico firm again in it. The act ends with Lodovico's soliloquy on the duplicity of the great, the imagery of the speech again turning on the unchastity and lustfulness of women.

The last act is set in Padua, shortly after the action of Act IV; the time is indicated by the fact that the ambassadors are apparently returning from the Papal election.\(^{44}\) In this act we have the falling action and the ultimate catastrophe.

In the first scene the audience meets the assassins in their various disguises, Francisco as a moor and Lodovico and Gasparo as Capuchins. Until the end of the play, the avengers remain disguised; thus Webster emphasizes the theme of appearance and reality throughout the last act. That characters wearing disguises were not recognized by other characters was, of course, a convention of the Renaissance stage. After some talk of the coming entertainments in honor of Brachiano's wedding, the conspirators have a chance to discuss their plan for revenge. Lodovico's determination to make the revenge complete by murdering the soul as well as the body is typically Elizabethan.

The intrigue between Zanche and Flamineo is developed in this scene, later in the scene to be used to incite the quarrel between Flamineo and his brother and later in the act to give Zanche motivation for telling Francisco the details of the deaths of Camillo and Isabella. Finally, there is

\(^{44}\) But op. Lucas, I, 247.
in the scene another example of Flamineo’s malcontent openness as he freely discusses with the disguised Duke of Florence the kind of parasite he would be and advises the Duke on securing a pension before being cast aside by a powerful ingrate.

The short second scene serves two functions: it serves to give the revengers an opportunity to initiate their plan to kill Brachiano and it gives additional justification for the death of Flamineo in the last scene. Flamineo has been a fairly sympathetic character throughout the play; therefore it is possible that the audience would not willingly accept his death. But the fratricide that he commits in this scene makes him altogether culpable; he must be punished. Flamineo’s evil nature, which has not been emphasized up to this point, is made evident in this scene, not only by his killing of Marcello but also by reference (twice within a few lines) to his having broken a cross as a child. After the murder Cornelia, who witnessed it, first runs at Flamineo with a knife, then controls herself and tries to exonerate him before Brachiano. The Duke, understanding what has happened, condemns Flamineo to daily suit for life. While Brachiano is thus occupied with Cornelia and Flamineo, Lodovico has the opportunity to poison his helmet.

Scene three of the last act presents the audience with the first part of the revenge: Brachiano is poisoned and dies. Furthermore the means of murdering Isabella and Camillo are revealed by Zanche to the avengers, thus tying up some loose ends before the final resolution. Another
important function of the scene is that Webster uses it to show that Brachiano and Vittoria really love each other. Brachiano, stricken, calls for his love: "Where's this good woman? had I infinite worlds, / They were too little for thee. Must I leave thee?" (18-19) And Brachiano's last words are the cry "Vittoria! Vittoria!" (170) It is this cry that nearly undoes the avengers, because they have already revealed themselves to Brachiano, thinking that he will never again see anyone else. Webster has here given the audience a final moment of suspense. But the avengers succeed in getting rid of Vittoria before they are revealed. Vittoria's response to the Duke's death is a simple, and apparently heartfelt, line "O mee! This place is hell." (182) The line is probably intended both figuratively and literally by Webster.

Flamineo's choral function also is utilized in this scene. Through Flamineo, Webster reminds the audience that this is a battle between great men who live in a world of calculation and design, of revenge and death. And Flamineo's words emphasize once more the theme of appearance versus reality. Leading up to the death of Brachiano are numerous images of death -- owls, wolves, corpses, carrion and graves, for example. It is against the background of death that Flamineo offers more comments on the hypocrisy and corruption of courts and of women. As his lord lies dying, full of dread, Flamineo gives what can be taken to be a choral comment on the deaths of the powerful. Surrounded by flatterers, he says, great men die alone and unlamented. Those who cry
"...but weep over their step-mothers graves." (50) And of his sister's grief, the cynical Flamineo believes that "There's nothing sooner drie than womens teares." (189) But this would-be Machiavel recognizes and admires the sure hand of the true Machiavel in Brachiano's death. Ironically, it is to the disguised Francisco himself that Flamineo theorizes about such a murder as that Brachiano:

Those are found weightie strokes which come from th' hand,
But those are killing strokes which come from th' head,
O the rare trickes of a Machivillian! (194-96)

The audience, however, is reminded of the view that others have of Flamineo by the juxtaposition in Brachiano's line: "Ile free the Court/From all foule vermin. Where's Flamineo?" (125-26)\(^45\)

The death of Brachiano is a singular success for the avengers. Disguised as holy men, they advise the Duke that he is dying with all his sins unforgiven. They have killed the soul as well as the body, the wish of the Renaissance avenger. The irony of men disguised as friars sending the soul to hell is emphasized by the words with which they dismiss Vittoria before Brachiano can reveal them: "...for charitie;/For Christian charitie, avoid the chamber." (173-74)

The scene closes with Zanche's revelation to the Duke of Florence of the means by which Isabella and Camillo were murdered. This revelation had been motivated earlier (the first scene of this act) and was prepared for again in this

\(^{45}\) Lucas, I, 256, n. 126.
scene by such lines as Brachiano's warning to Vittoria, "Do not kisse me, for I shall poysone thee" (27) and his description of Flamineo's walking with great care "For feare of breaking's necke." (113) Each line is reminiscent of the means of one of the murders. Knowing the facts of the earlier murders, Francisco is triumphant at the close of the scene, knowing that regardless of justice, the avengers' work will be applauded.

The falling action of the play continues toward the final resolution through the fourth scene. Flamineo, condemned by the young Duke Giovanni to live in disgrace, resolves to visit his sister in order to learn what financial settlement she will make on him now that she has come into her own wealth. After the young Duke has spoken to Flamineo, then sent word that Flamineo is banished from his presence, Flamineo goes to see his mother preparing Marcello's corpse for burial. Cornelia's madness in this scene is conventional, in the revenge tradition. And as is well known, madness was also thought of as a comic relief for some elements of the audience. After Flamineo has seen his mother and heard her lament in the lovely "Call for the Robin-Red-brest and the wren" lines (89-98), he seems to suffer remorse. He mentions compassion (107-109) and conscience (115); but these feelings are at best passing, at worst less than genuine.

46 There have been, however, several other references to breaking one's neck.

47 Harold Jenkins, p. 50.
Perhaps he expresses grief in order to be rid of Francisco, for after Francisco's exit his thoughts immediately turn to Vittoria's wealth. The short scene with the ghost of Brachiano (in the tradition of the tragedy of revenge) serves only to decide him that he must hurry to gain his share of the wealth. The scene ends with his threat to murder Vittoria if she fail to provide for him, a notion scarcely indicative of a troubled conscience.

The brief fifth scene (15 lines) between Francisco and Lodovico, overheard by Hortensio, a follower of the slain Brachiano, makes possible the arrival of Giovanni and the ambassadors of the end of the final scene of the play. Hortensio, overhearing the making of a plot, will raise some men to attempt to circumvent it.

Scene six, the last scene of the play, presents the final part of the tragedy (begun with the death of Brachiano) and the denouement. The themes of the play -- appearance and reality, illustrated by the hypocrisy and corruption of women and of courts, and the power of Fate -- are also emphasized a final time, by the dialogue and by the action, in this scene. This last scene also contains some of the best poetry of the play. Finally, there are many sententiae, defining the action and characterizing. The scene opens with Flamineo demanding what he feels to be his fair share from Vittoria. Her refusal is the first example in the play that emphasizes her hypocrisy. It was, after all, Flamineo who first brought together his sister and Brachiano; she should owe him something. The elaborate deception with the
pistols that follows is also illustrative of the theme of appearance and reality. Flamineo deceives Vittoria and Zanche with the unarmed weapons; they are false to him in their promise to commit suicide after killing him. And the reason that Flamineo gives for self destruction is the evil of courts. Great men are not to be trusted, he says, and if Brachiano could not survive, surely minor courtiers like themselves have no chance. Suicide, therefore, is their most noble course. After trying his sister in order to see whether she could be trusted to fulfill a promise made at gun point (she could not), Flamineo delivers another of his misogynous diatribes (160-66).

When Lodovico and Gasparo burst in on the three, the action is all but over. Vittoria attempts to charm the revengers, but failing in this attempt she dies well as do Flamineo and Zanche. All accept death in the stoic manner admired by Renaissance audiences. Vittoria again, though she is physically mastered, verbally masters her murderers. She is not reduced to pleading for life but accepts death. When she is stabbed, she has the right words for the avengers:

"Twas a manly blow,
The next thou giv'st, murder some suckling infant,
And then thou wilt be famous. (233-35)

As she lies dying, Vittoria says, "O my greatest sinne lay in my blood./Now my blood pales for't." (230-41) The implication of this speech is that Vittoria is not altogether responsible for her actions. They were governed by her blood; hence it could be said that her life was governed by fate. Her speech about her dying is also true of her living: "My
soule, like a ship in a blacke storme,/Is driven I know not whither." (248-54) She dies uttering one of Webster's sententiae, a comment on courtly corruption: "O happy they that never saw the Court,/ 'Nor ever knew great Man but by report." (261-62)

Flamineo's speeches at the end are in character with his cynicism throughout the play and emphasize the unimportance of man in a world governed by an indifferent fate. When asked what he is thinking of just before he is to be murdered, he responds

Nothing; of nothing: leave thy idle questions,
I am in [sic] way to study a long silence,
To prate were idle, I remember nothing.
Theres nothing of so infinite vexation
As mans owne thoughts. (203-207)

Flamineo's last words are almost a series of sententiae. "Wee cease to grieve, cease to be fortunes slaves,/Nay cease to dye by dying" (252-54) is an example of one comment on fate. Again he comments on the worthlessness of man's life in the face of fortune when he says "While we looke up to heaven we confound/Knowledge with Knowledge. ô I am in a mist." (259-60)

As the stoic deaths of the brother and sister build sympathy for them with the audience, so do Flamineo's nearly last words to Vittoria:

Th'art a noble sister,
I love thee now; if woeman doe breed man,
Shee ought to teach him manhood: Fare thee well.
Know many a glorious woeman that are fam'd
For masculine vertue have been vitious,
Onely a happier silence did betyde them.
She hath faults, who hath the art to hide them. (241-247)

Lucas points out that this speech is an example of how the Renaissance dramatist puts into the mouth of a character words

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that he believes and that he wants the audience to believe.\footnote{48 Lucas, I, 269, n. 241-247.}

Vittoria and Flamineo die bravely with the sympathy of the audience. The avengers, with their horrible rapacity, also increase the sympathy for Vittoria and Flamineo. Lodovico, with Flamineo at the point of his sword, gloats

\begin{quote}
Oh could I kill you forty times a day \\
And us't it foure yeere together; 'tweare too little: \\
Nought greev's but that you are too few to feede \\
The famine of our vengeance. \(199-202\)
\end{quote}

Lodovico's final speech, though typical of the Italian revenge villain,\footnote{49 Lucas, I, 270, n. 296-99.} is also an example of the avengers' blood thirst:

\begin{quote}
I do glory yet, \\
That I can call this act mine owne: For my part, \\
The racke, the gallowes, and the torturing sheale \\
Shall bee but sound sleepees to me, here's my rest -- \\
"I limb'd this night-peece and it was my best." \(295-99\)
\end{quote}

Giovanni's final statement brings about a static balance, a denouement.

In The White Devil Webster has followed the usual pattern of Renaissance tragedy. He has used many of the conventions of this genre, depicted some interesting, nearly compelling characters, and written some splendid poetry. It is, taken all in all, a "night-peece" but a solid piece of workmanship expressing a view that, in some parts of the world at least, appearance differs from reality, that there is much hypocrisy and corruption, especially in women and in courts.

From the opening of the play onward, Webster emphasizes the idea of appearance as opposed to reality. Even the title
means hypocrisy, and although it is probably intended to apply specifically to Vittoria, it applies as well to others. All of the main characters -- Vittoria, Brachiano, Flamineo, Monticelso and Francisco -- are hypocrites, at various times appearing to be what they are not. And even some of the minor characters such as Cornelia, who is basically honest and as unsinful as anyone else in the play, are somewhat hypocritical. Other characters employ disguises to hide not just their real natures but even their real physical appearances. Naturally all of this duplicity leads to ambiguous situations such as the revengers, disguised as holy men, murdering the Duke. Finally, the fact that these people are all courtiers emphasizes the false nature of courts and of courtly life. Even the conclusion is far from hopeful, for the great Machiavels, Francisco and the Cardinal, are still abroad.

Through character and situation, primarily, Webster has propounded a view of a corrupt and sinful world. Because that world was Italian, Webster's audience would not hesitate to accept it.
IV. THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

Within some two years, after his first independent work, Webster wrote his second great tragedy, The Duchess of Malfi. Although this play suffers from some of the carlessness in detail that is characteristic of Webster, indeed of many of his contemporaries, the overall construction of the play, the dramaturgy, is basically sound according to Renaissance principles.

The opening of this play is quite different from the opening of The White Devil. The earlier play opened abruptly; the first scene was very short. This play opens with a long first scene that contains exposition, characterization, the exciting incident or force, and the beginning of the rising action. It is an opening that Una Ellis-Fermor calls unconventional in method, comparable to the method of a novelist.

The play opens with Dello and Antonio coming onstage. These two are the first of a procession of characters who appear in this scene, the processional method of introduction and exposition. Dello, the first speaker, serves several important functions in the play, although, because he is not

1 For the dating of this play, see Lucas, II, 3-5 and John Russell Brown, "On the Dating of Webster's The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi," Philological Quarterly, XXXI (1952), 333-62.

2 This play is also the last independent Webster tragedy extant. Subsequent to The Duchess of Malfi was the lost play, The Guise. See Lucas, I, 54 and II, 321. Webster mentions The Guise in the dedication of The Devil's Law-Case.

3 Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, pp. 36-37.
a participant in the tragedy, he has been generally ignored by commentators. Tracing Delio through Webster's possible sources, Lucas points out that he was probably Bandello, the writer of the novella that is the ultimate source for the story of the Duchess, and that Bandello apparently knew Antonio shortly before Antonio was murdered in Milan. But in the sources there is little characterization of Delio; he appears largely as a name. Therefore Webster had a free hand in creating a character for the play. He chose to use Delio as a functional character, creating little more than was necessary to serve the function. But Delio's importance should not be minimized; for in addition to opening the play, he closes it. The last speech in a Renaissance tragedy is usually given to the person of highest rank who has survived. Delio, a man of no great rank, shares the stage at the end with, among others, Pescara and Malateste, noblemen; but it is Delio who gives the last speech. Webster considered him an important enough character to speak the final sententious couplet which sums up the main theme of the play. Delio's main functions in the play are three: he serves as a confidant to Antonio; he serves as a foil to Antonio; and he functions as a resolving agent in the last act.

Delio's first speech identifies Antonio, sets the place of action and gives some exposition: Delio welcomes Antonio back to his own country from France. He then asks Antonio

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about the French court, giving Antonio the opportunity to offer a discourse on statesmanship. Antonio, who is nothing if not honest, expounds upon the scrupulous honesty and orderliness of the French court and of the necessity of courtiers to instruct princes when needful. It is the lack of honesty and of order in the court of the Duchess that brings about the tragedy. The Duchess' marriage to Antonio violates order; the concealment of the marriage is dishonest.

In his source Webster found little to go on for the creation of Antonio. He knew that Antonio Bologna was of respected family of Naples, that Bologna had resided in France and that he had served the Duchess of Malfi whom he had married. He knew that the actual Antonio had been murdered in Milan. Beyond these facts, the dramatist had little. But the chief function of Antonio is actually little more than that of chief complicating agent in the play; therefore Webster did not have to lavish much characterization on him. His character develops through the course of the play from passivity to action (he is courted and proposed to in the first act; he resolves to see the Cardinal to attempt to resolve their differences in the last), but he is neither wise nor strong. He is a somewhat foolish idealist, honest, overtrusting and generally ineffectual. These characteristics can be seen in his being wooed by the Duchess (I, i), his loss at what to do

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5 The general idea of this speech is similar to that of Cornelia's speech to Brachiano in The White Devil (I, ii, 279-81). Honesty and order in court as an ideal opposed to the actual corruption of courts is one of Webster's favorite dramatic themes.
when his wife goes into labor (II, 1) and his hope to be reconciled with his brothers-in-law and his trust in them through the last three acts. These are but three examples; this interpretation of the character will be expounded throughout the chapter. It should be added that, as Irving Ribner points out, Antonio also functions as a choral commentator at times; for the audience sees the action through his eyes. Antonio follows the side of the Duchess, but he doesn't seek revenge; he seeks reconciliation, Ribner says. It should be noted, however, that no one on the side of the Duchess seeks revenge. Those on the Duchess' side seek only peace. Ribner concludes that in Antonio there is "...the final moral statement to which all of the parts of The Duchess of Malfi were carefully designed to give poetic expression," man's ability to accept pain and frustration yet die with courage and dignity.\(^6\) That Antonio sometimes does function as a chorus seems clear. G. Wilson Knight says,

"Antonio is of a stoic, philosophic turn. He has human insight, caution and integrity; he is a man of sane judgement, agnostic and wise. Ambition he despises."\(^7\)

Parts of Knight's view support the choral interpretation. Other parts seem rather strained. Antonio is not such a stoic that he remains passive to his wife's sensuality: he sires three children in short order. And he is not too stoical to enjoy the boudoir banter of his wife (the beginning of III, 11), nor to feel grief at the separation from his wife and

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\(^6\) Ribner, pp. 120-22.

\(^7\) Knight, p. 108.
two of his children (V). Robert Ornstein describes Antonio as suffering from "paralysis of will." Antonio and Bosola are alike in this regard and, Ornstein feels, it is appropriate that each is the agent of the other's death.\(^8\) That Antonio is deficient in will until the last act seems indisputable. But it is the marriage of Antonio and the Duchess, the protagonist, that brings about the complications of the play. This is the major importance of Antonio.

After his discourse on statesmanship, Antonio introduces Bosola to the audience. Webster has arranged this bit of irony well, for Bosola is just the type of "dissolute/And infamous" (9-10) person who Antonio has just said must be driven from the well ordered court. Antonio's first comment on Bosola identifies Bosla as a melancholy man, in many ways the Flamineo of this play. Antonio calls him a "Court-Gall" (24) which, as Lucas points out, is a cancer on the body of the court and also gives the suggestion of bitterness that goes along with a melancholy temperament.\(^9\) Antonio goes on to describe Bosola in the usual terms of the malcontent, the man outside society who rails at abuses and who is blunt and apparently honest in his speech. This is a man who is an active agent of evil, who plans revenge or murder.\(^10\) Antonio observes that Bosola's "rayling/Is not for simple love of

\(^8\) Ornstein, p. 142.


\(^10\) As was pointed out previously, this is the description of the malcontent given by Theodore Spencer. See Chapter III, n. 12.
Piety: "(24-5) this man would be evil if given the opportunity. Antonio's comment also points up Webster's theme of appearance versus reality, as important in this play as in The White Devil.

At this point the Cardinal enters. Here the reader of the play must picture the grouping of characters on the stage and remind himself of the Renaissance dramatic convention that one group could converse without being heard by the others. In fact in some such groupings as this the conversations though following sequentially could be said to be occurring simultaneously.

Bosola engages the Cardinal, one of the two brothers of the Duchess, in a conversation, complaining that the Cardinal has not paid him for services and lamenting the times in which they live, times in which services go unrecognized. The extent of the perversion of Bosola's values can be recognized, however, by realizing that his speech,

I have done you better service then to be slighted thus: miserable age, where onely the reward of doing well, is the doing of it! (32-34)

refers to a service for which he was sentenced to the galleys. After the Cardinal's exit Bosola continues his malcontent railing, calling the Cardinal a man evil enough to possess the devil and make him worse. The imagery of Bosola's speeches also helps to set the tone of corruption that surrounds the Duchess' brothers: "dogge dayes" (40), "Divell" (47), "Standing-pooles" (51), "Catterpillers" (52), and "Horse-leach" (54). Bosola likens the great brothers to trees growing over stagnant water and says that their fruit is rotten, fit only for scavengers; but Bosola would have some
of it and is incensed that he does not. He would like to feed upon them like a leech, he says. To Antonio and Dello he complains that an old soldier (actually his service was murdering not soldiering) should have better treatment than crutches and a hospital. He exits comparing a court to a hospital in that in each, one man's head is at another man's feet. Such a comparison again suggests the infection of courts.

Dello recognizes Bosola as a man who had served time in the galleys for a murder commissioned by the Cardinal, and Dello's recognition is supported by Bosola's previous speech to the Cardinal. But Dello's speech elicits a curious response from Antonio, one which has been said by some commentators to be an example of Webster's shabby workmanship; for it seems to contradict what Antonio has said only fifty lines earlier about Bosola.11 C. G. Thayer sees this apparent contradiction of Antonio's as evidence of the ambiguity of Bosola.12 Though Thayer makes a worthwhile point about the ambiguous character of Bosola, he and all other commentators overlook the fact that the inconsistency is in the character of Antonio. Antonio is hopeful to the end, always looking for the good and for mitigating circumstances for apparent evil; therefore, though he has already

11 Clifford Leech, for example, in John Webster cites this varying attitude of Antonio's toward Bosola as one of several structural defects in the play (pp. 66-8).

12 C. G. Thayer, "The Ambiguity of Bosola," Studies in Philology, LIV (1957), 163-64. As Moore points out, a close examination shows that Thayer's argument is unconvincing. (Moore, p. 165.)
said that Bosola would be "leacherous, covetous, or proud,/ Bloody, or envious," if it were possible (26-27), he now says that Bosola is valiant (which does not conflict with the previous summation) and that his melancholy is corrupting his goodness.

The character of Bosola is one of interest and complexity. In the sources he appears only as a name, the man who murdered Antonio. But in discussions of the characters, Bosola is the most frequently examined. Thayer considers Bosola a tragic protagonist in the play. Lacking an active tragic hero, Webster developed one in Bosola who comes to see, through the suffering of the Duchess, that in an evil universe to be virtuous is to be true to one's own nature. So Bosola becomes true to his own nature. Bogard sees Bosola as functioning to arouse the spirit of greatness in the Duchess, to see to it that she retains her integrity, her fidelity to her own nature. Bosola is not, to Bogard, an evil man but a man forced to forsake his own character. Irving Ribner also points out Bosola's function of girding the Duchess, of bringing out her greatness when she begins to fear. Several others emphasize the honesty of Bosola; Parrott and Ball, for example, say that he is honest, doing evil work because it is his job. He knows, they say, the difference between good and evil but feels that he can't

13 Ibid., 162-171.
15 Ribner, pp. 110-11.
fight blind Fortune. Una Ellis-Fermor sees three Bosolas: the Machiavellian that he considers himself, the malcontent seen by those around him and finally the decent sort that is the inner man. Yet another but similar view to those above is that of Fredson Bowers who sees Webster changing Bosola from the conventional tool-villain to a man of some character, "a misfit, a man of worthier talents forced into a degrading position," but making the most of his situation by being efficient. G. Wilson Knight sees Bosola as "brave but embittered" yet depicted so that the audience would "believe fundamentally in his better 'nature.'" Finally, a different critical view is that of Leech who, despite all of Bosola's activity in the play, sees his main function to be that of chorus.

Bosola's function and character in the play encompass many of these views. Though he is a character of great importance in the play, it is not a play about him; he is not the protagonist. The major conflict of the play is between the Duchess, the protagonist, and her brothers, the antagonists. Bosola, as the agent of the brothers, has much of the conventional tool-villain in him. Ultimately,

16 Thomas Marc Parrott and Robert Hamilton Ball, A Short View of Elizabethan Drama (New York, 1943), p. 231.
17 Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, p. 179.
18 Bowers, p. 178.
19 Knight, p. 108.
20 Leech, pp. 87-88.
he functions as resolving agent though his machinations early in the play also make him serve the function of complicating agent. Like Flamineo in *The White Devil* he is an imperfect Machiavel matched against a superior Machiavel, the Cardinal. Bosola comes closer to triumphing than Flamineo did, but still he cannot be said to be victorious because he dies with his adversary. His malcontent cloak gives him the opportunity to speak bluntly and honestly; consequently his function is sometimes chorus-like. Perhaps most important is the fact that in the many disguises in which he appears, he serves as a physical embodiment of the theme of appearance as opposed to reality. The fact that his character develops through the play also aids this function. Bosola is not so much ambiguous as developed. As the play progresses, Webster shows us different sides of the character. Bosola has in him the capacity for both good and evil, but there are degrees of evil which are beyond him. The tortures to which the Duchess is subjected are beyond his capacity for evil. He comes, therefore, to understand himself. Although dramaturgically Bosola is not the protagonist of the play, he is perhaps the most important character.

After Antonio's second comment on Bosola (75-83), a new group of characters comes onstage, but these are all minor characters -- Silvio, Castruchio, Roderigo, and Grisolan. They are promptly joined, however, by the Duke Ferdinand, the Duchess' other brother, the co-antagonist of the play. There is in the short scene that follows among the members of this group some ironic foreshadowing. Informed
that Antonio has won the tilting contest, Ferdinand says "Give him the Jewell!" (93) indeed Antonio takes the jewel when it is offered; this jewel is Ferdinand's sister. Most of the rest of this scene is taken up with bantering between Ferdinand and Castruchio, the husband of Julia. The wife of Castruchio (a name borrowed from another in the source appropriately to name this character) is well known to be the mistress of the Cardinal. So when Ferdinand suggests that Castruchio have a deputy to sleep or eat for him (102), the others recognize the implication that he already has a deputy to go to bed with his wife for him. And this subtle jest brings up to Ferdinand the subject of Julia; he mentions her in his next speech. He implies her treatment of her husband with the statement "Thou toldst me thy wife could not endure fighting," (107) with "fighting" a double entendre. And her promiscuity is implied by the double entendre in the lines about her persuading the young gallants to put up their weapons (115-116). Even Castruchio's horse is worthless (117-121). Ferdinand's speech "But I can laugh at your Foole my Lord" (130) seems to imply that Castruchio is the fool. His fool, Castruchio says, cannot speak. With a wanton like Julia for a wife it is well for Castruchio that the fool is dumb. So Castruchio, who appears again later in the play as messenger from Bosola to Ferdinand, is characterized. He is much like Vittoria's husband, Camillo, in The White Devil. But the first view of Ferdinand tells us little of him; he and his brother are characterized in the next short scene by Antonio.
After the other main and secondary characters -- the Cardinal, the Duchess, Cariola (the Duchess' servant) and Julia -- of the play have entered, Delio asks Antonio to tell him about the strangers in the Duchess' court. Antonio begins with the antagonists, the Cardinal first. Here is a man of the church who is a gambler, a lover and a warrior, all things which Delio has heard about him (155-6). And in these attributes Webster follows his source. But, Antonio says, this describes only the surface of the man. Inside he is melancholy, scheming and envious. He employs spies, panderers and "a thousand such politi­call Mon­sters" (162-3) to forward his plots. He openly gave bribes in his attempt to achieve the Papacy. But, equivocates Antonio, "Some good he hath done." (117) This inner man Webster added in order to create a character for the play.

The Duke is much like his brother; both appear to be one thing while really being something else. Antonio describes Ferdinand as being

...a most perverse, and turbulent Nature --
What appears in him mirth, is merely outside,
If he laugh heartily, it is to laugh
All honesty out of fashion. (169-72)

As a judge the Duke is dishonest, caring nothing for justice and accepting bribes from the wealthy (175-183). Webster uses images of toads, spiders and the devil to describe the

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21 This is another example of grouping onstage in which one group does not hear the comments of another group.

22 This is an echo of Lodovico's complaint in The White Devil (I, 1) that there are two standards of justice -- one for the rich, one for the poor. Also in this speech Lodovico uses images of "wolves," an appropriate echo considering Ferdinand's coming lycanthropy.
two eminent brothers.

In the characterization of the antagonists, then, Webster presents again his theme of the difference between appearance and reality. Finally, the fact that it is Antonio who describes the brothers gives the audience pause when at the beginning of the last act he asks Delio, "What thinke you of my hope of reconcilement/To the Aragonian brethren?" (V, i, 1-2).

Antonio's last characterization is of the Duchess, but it is of little help to the audience, for Antonio speaks like a man in love even if he does not yet realize it. His praise of the Duchess borders on being fulsome. The description leaves no doubt that here is a lovely and good woman, but even Delio responds, "Fye Antonio,/You play the wire-drawer with her commendations." (210-11) The audience learns more of the Duchess by seeing her in action. Briefly, Travis Bogard sees the Duchess as having much in common with Vittoria. The Duchess, he says, is Vittoria without the evil but with the "passionate temperament alchemized to gentleness and sympathy." And even this characterization of the protagonist is somewhat inadequate when the Duchess' spirit and integrity are seen.

With the final praise of the Duchess by Antonio, the course of the scene shifts from exposition to rising action. The audience now begins to see the characters in action. The Cardinal and Ferdinand secure a position for Bosola with their

23 Bogard, p. 63.
sister though the Cardinal wants to remain anonymous in this plot. Bosola is to be a spy in the court of the Duchess, working for Ferdinand. Because he wishes to remain out of the employment of Bosola, or seemingly so, the Cardinal has slighted him (237-38) and the Duke tells him that the Cardinal doesn't like him (245). But it is the Cardinal who has chosen Bosola as their agent, over Ferdinand's suggestion of Antonio. Bosola shows himself as a true malcontent while talking to Ferdinand. He bluntly criticizes the Cardinal for ingratitude. When Ferdinand responds that great men must be circumspect, Bosola answers,

> Yet take heed;  
> For to suspect a friend unworthely,  
> Instructs him the next way to suspect you,  
> And prompts him to deceive you. (259-62)

Bosola's blunt warning should have been heeded by the brothers, for ultimately Bosola brings about their downfall. After the above speech, Ferdinand abruptly gives Bosola gold, apparently nearly pouring the coins all over him. Bosola's response sounds almost like a vaudeville routine but is really quite in keeping with his character at this point:

> Ferd. There's gold.  
> Bos. So!  
> What follows? (Never raind such showres as these  
> Without thunderbolts i' th taile of them;) whose  
> Throat must I cut? (263-6)

Bosola is ready for and up to murder; killing is nothing new to him and has, from his point of view, a certain honor about it. But he balks at spying which is dishonorable in his code. When he learns what his job is to be, Bosola uses the words "familiars" and "Intelligencer," both of which Lucas points
out, had evil connotations for the audience. He says of the money that has been given to him,

Take your Divels
Which Hell calls Angels: these curs'd gifts would make You a corrupter, me an impudent traitor, And should I take these, they'd take me to Hell.

(285-8)

Bosola's strange code of honor makes him accept the offer, however; for when he learns that Ferdinand has secured him a genuine job with the Duchess, he cannot refuse to spy because that would make him an ingrate. So the interview is concluded with Bosola's bluntly cynical

...what's my place?
The Provisor-ship o' th horse? say then my corruption Grew out of horse-doong: I am your creature. (311-3)

This interview between the Duke and Bosola abounds with imagery of hell and the devil, emphasizing for the audience the evil nature of the antagonists and their tool.

Seeing his brother and sister approach, Ferdinand sends Bosola away. The scene that follows between the three, with the Duchess' servant only witnessing it (Cariola has no lines till after the brothers exit), is a return to exposition. Webster uses the device of having two characters bracket a third in a verbal assault. The swift dialogue between the two men consists of a series of admonitions to the Duchess not to remarry. They emphasize the sensuality of marriage, telling her that a second marriage would be wanton, lustful.


25 This sort of "patterned dialogue" is a convention of dramatic writing of the period. See Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions, pp. 107-108.
The Cardinal mentions the hypocrisy and libidinousness of women in general (335-8) and the Duke brings up the corruption and depravity of courts (339-42), two themes that Webster frequently employs. Further, they warn her specifically against that which soon comes to pass, a secret marriage. Finally in a piece of dramatic irony, Ferdinand warns his sister that they will discover her actions. When he says,

...yet (beleev't)
Your darkest actions: nay, your privat'st thoughts,
Will come to light (348-50)

the audience knows that he has engaged a spy though the Duchess does not know it. The question which has troubled many who have written about this play is the reason for the brothers' opposition to a remarriage by their sister. Some find no motivation intentionally supplied by Webster; Leech is an example of such a critic.26 However, Doran points out that a Renaissance audience would often accept a story for its own sake without questioning motivation; motives were taken for granted. Especially was this necessary, she says, when the dramatist used an Italian novella as the source.27 The motivation of Ferdinand is treated at some length by James L. Calderwood. The question of Ferdinand's motivation, he says, shows that Ferdinand is unsure of himself, not that Webster is. Either Ferdinand cannot or will not discuss his

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26 Leech, pp. 98-106. He finds incest as a possible unintentional motivation.
27 Doran, pp. 250-51.
reason for not wanting his sister to marry. When Ferdinand and the Cardinal tell the Duchess not to remarry, they present opposition without reason for opposition except that Ferdinand has stressed the sexual side of remarriage and has mentioned degree. 28 To what Calderwood has said might be added that conventionally in Renaissance drama the motivation of villains is that they are evil. The Aragonian brothers have already been depicted as evil; the audience would accept, even expect, evil actions from them. This expectation of evil also accounts, in part, for the motivation for the Duchess' persecution. Earlier in the scene when the Duke is hiring Bosola as his spy, he says that he does not want his sister to marry again. To Bosola's question "No, Sir?" he responds "Do not aske the reason: but be satisfied, I say I would not." (274-6) This exchange supports the view put forth by Calderwood that the Duke either cannot or will not give his reason for opposition. The Duke gives another reason after his sister has died. To Bosola he says

...I had hope
(Had she continu'd widow) to have gain'd
An infinite masse of Treasure by her death:
And that was the mayne cause; her Marriage -- (IV, ii, 302-5)

This reason is patently false, for in III, iii, 82-83, Ferdinand mentions his nephew, the Duchess' son by the first marriage. This boy would inherit his mother's wealth. Actually, he had already inherited title and wealth from his father; his mother acted for him during his minority, but she was the

28 Calderwood, pp. 135-6.
dowager. Historically, there was such a boy; and historically, his mother was murdered by agents of his uncles. Did these actual men have more motivation that Webster's characters? As the story appears in Webster's sources, they had less; for Webster has supplied their basically evil natures, Ferdinand's madness (which will be dealt with later) and a suggestion of incestuous feelings for his sister in Ferdinand. Several writers have commented on the possibility of incestuous feelings in Ferdinand. Leech mentions the possibility and Calderwood stresses its importance. Knight describes the Duke as "irascible" with a "pathological distaste for gaiety and laughter." Ferdinand, Knight says, attaches his anti-sexual feelings to religion; but the "suggestion of an incestuous love as his motive receives support from his last cry."29 This dying cry is

My sister, oh! my sister, ther's the cause on't.
"Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust,
"Like Diamonds, we are out with our owne dust."
(V, v, 90-93)

Other lines that might be cited to support incestuous feelings in Ferdinand are the famous "Cover her face Mine eyes dazell: she di'd yong." (IV, ii, 281) and also "Damne her, that body of hers," (IV, i, 146). But beyond specific lines, there is a general feeling about this mad Duke that he is holding something back, that there is something that he doesn't admit, even to himself. And the lack of specifics makes Ferdinand's villainy more terrible. After the brothers learn of the Duchess' marriage and children, they have even

29 Knight, pp. 107-8.
more motivation.

When she is able to speak during the verbal hammering by her brothers, the Duchess assures them that she has no intention of marrying. But as soon as they depart, she confesses to Cariola, her confidant, that their opposition will not alter her intention of taking a husband (382-92). Even the good people in Webster (though the Duchess is not entirely blameless in other regards) dissemble: what they appear to be on the surface is sometimes other than what they really are.

After her confession to Cariola, the Duchess places her servant behind the arras and summons Antonio. Thus begins the final part of the first scene of the play, the marriage of Antonio and the Duchess. This marriage is the exciting force of the play; it precipitates the conflict between the main characters and is the cause for the seeking of revenge. The Duchess is, in general, the aggressor in this wooing scene; but Antonio is the first to bring up the subject of marriage. The Duchess tells him that they are to draw up her will and asks him what good deed she should remember in it first. He responds that she should first bestow herself upon a husband. "Twere strange/If there were no will in you to marry againe." (447-8) This hint is all that the Duchess needs, and with her own wedding band she has soon taken the amazed Antonio as her husband. Antonio, a good servant who knows his place, says that he is unworthy of the honor but characterizes himself as honest:

Were there nor heaven, nor hell,
I should be honest: I have long serv'd vertue,
And never tane wages of her. (503-5)
His view is directly opposite to the one expressed earlier in the scene by Bosola. When Antonio asks how her brothers will respond to their marriage, the Duchess responds that "... time will easily Scatter the tempest." (539-40) Antonio characteristically comments on this that

These words should be mine,  
And all the parts you have spoke, if some part of it  
Would not have savour'd flattery. (541-3)

Antonio seems never to have the right words; almost always, he reacts rather than acts. With Cariola as the witness, then, the Duchess asks a blessing on their marriage: "Blesse (Heaven) this sacred Gordian, which let violence/Never untwine." (549-50) As Lucas points out, her phrase bodes ill, for the Gordian knot was not untied but severed. There are, in fact, several other passages in the wooing scene that foreshadow evil that is to come. Antonio's reference to ambition as madness not kept pent up

But in faire lightsome lodgings, and is girt  
With wild noyce of pratling visitants,  
Which makes it lunatique, beyond all cure -- (484-6)

suggests the madmen of IV, ii. And the Duchess' words about herself, "'Tis not the figure cut in Allabaster/Kneels at my husbands tombe:" (520-1) suggest both death and the wax figures of her husband and child shown to the Duchess in IV, i. Finally, the Duchess says "I now am blinde." (565) Her intent apparently is that she is blind to the consequences that are to ensue from this marriage. She invites her new husband to "...leade your Fortune by the hand,/Unto your

30 Lucas, II, 141, n. 549.
marriage bed:" (567-8) these lines are ironically echoed, however, by the Duchess' speech, "And Fortune seemes onely to have her eie-sight,/To behold my Tragedy" (IV, ii, 37-38). The scene ends with Cariola's fearful musing that her mistress' actions show madness and that the Duchess is to be pitied.

The first scene of Act II opens with Bosola baiting the simple Castruchio who wishes to be known as an eminent courtier. Bosola is continuing his malcontent guise as Ferdinand had suggested:

Be your selfe:  
Keep your old garbe of melencholly: 'twill expresse  
You envy those that stand above your reach,  
Yet strive not to come neere'em: This will gaine  
Accessse, to private lodgings, where you selfe  
May (like a pollique dormouse -- (I, i, 302-307)

Bosola instructs Castruchio on the foolishness and hypocrisy of lawyers who are a favorite target of Webster's. When the Old Lady enters and interrupts his discourse on the foulness of lawyers, he doesn't even break stride in shifting his discourse to the foulness of the Old Lady in particular and women in general. By the use of cosmetics (most of which Bosola describes as disgusting), women attempt to make themselves appear something that they are not. Warming now to his task -- for Bosola enjoys his malcontent role; it suits him -- he offers a long comment on the foulness of man in general. This speech (47-64) seems to be some unintegrated moral comment, but it is really Bosola's way of throwing off

31 Ibid., 181, n. 37.  
32 See, for example, the trial scene in The White Devil.
suspicion. The advice given him by Ferdinand is sound; his railing gives him much freedom that he might otherwise not have. As soon as his complaints about mankind have driven off Castruchio and the Old Lady, the audience sees that Bosola has been carrying out his business for Ferdinand. The malcontent recognizes the Duchess' symptoms of pregnancy and has a test that he will try on her. Bosola's soliloquy informs the audience that several months have elapsed between the end of Act I and the beginning of this act and obviously reveals information about the test Bosola will administer with apricots.

Bosola's soliloquy is followed by the entrance of Antonio and Delio. Antonio has told his confidant of his marriage, but they turn their attention now to Bosola who dons the mask of the simple, honest man, a part of his malcontent appearance. Antonio is completely taken in by the guise and tells Bosola:

Because you would not seeme to appeare to th'world Puff'd up with your preferment: you continue This out of fashion mellancholly -- leave it, leave it (87-89)

As their conversation continues, Bosola launches into a long speech about the likeness of all men regardless of rank. The intent of this seems to be to draw Antonio out, to see if Antonio can be tricked into revealing something about their mistress (99-109). The speech begins with an image drawn from astrology, portentous of what is to come in Antonio's

33 Such telescoping of time is conventional in Renaissance drama
having the horoscope of his first-born cast.

As if on cue from Bosola after his remarks about the mighty, the Duchess and her attendants enter. She orders Bosola to secure for her a particular kind of carriage to which Bosola suspiciously replies, "The Duchesse [of Florence] us'd one, when she was great with childe." (114) And when the Duchess comments that she is much troubled with "the mother" (118-9), Bosola comments in an aside "I feare too much." (120) Much of what follows is taken up with comments on the Duchess' hysterical symptoms, symptoms which could be associated with pregnancy. Her quick temper with her women, her capriciousness about the wearing of hats in her presence (121-134) lead up to Bosola's test of having her eat apricots. The green fruit does not agree with her: "How they swell me!" (171) she says. Bosola is convinced. "Nay, you are too much swell'ed already," (172) he says in an aside. As she exits, the Duchess says to her husband "I feare I am undone." (176) His wife's falling into labor undoes Antonio, who fears discovery now that the pre-arrangement for the delivery must be discarded. But Delio quickly formulates a plan to save them while Antonio can say only, "I am lost in amazement: I know not what to think on't." (195) Here is Delio functioning as a foil to Antonio. The latter's helplessness is set off by the former's quick thinking.

The second scene of this act is a brief one, the action of which immediately follows that of the first. The scene

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34 Lucas notes (II, 148, n. 118-9) that this ailment is hysteria.
opens with Bosola and the Old Lady, who is evidently the midwife mentioned in the previous scene. Bosola, with more allusions to pregnancy, tries to get some information from the woman. With the entrance of Antonio and others, the Old Lady escapes from Bosola. Antonio then gives out his story that the Duchess has been robbed; therefore all must remain in their quarters. As he sends Delio off to Rome, presumably to keep an eye on the Duchess' brothers, he expresses to Delio his fear. But it is a vague fear: "...and yet feare presents me/Somewhat that looks like danger." (76-7) This vague "something" is rather like what later troubles Ferdinand -- his shadow -- or what later troubles the Cardinal -- the "thing" armed with a rake. Delio then warns his friend about false fears and against superstitions which cause false fears, then leaves; but no sooner has Delio gone than Antonio is informed of the birth of a son and happily sets out to have the infant's horoscope cast. Though belief in astrology was quite common in Webster's time, Antonio's immediate thought of a horoscope marks him as somewhat superstitious -- just what Delio has warned him against. So Scene 11 ends with another contrast between Delio and Antonio.

Up to this point in the play, the forces of the protagonist have been ascendant; but with the third scene of this act, there is a turn in favor of the antagonists. This scene is not the turning point of the play, for it does not insure

35 She is in a hurry to be about her business, but Bosola keeps detaining her with more abuse of women. The blocking of the scene would be amusing on stage.
the final outcome, but it is a complication that favors the side of the antagonists. The scene opens with Bosola attempting to discover the source of a noise he has heard. Antonio, returning from having his son's horoscope cast, encounters him. Bosola, challenged with being out despite the specific orders of the Duchess for all to stay in their rooms, has a splendid excuse:

Now all the Court's asleep, I thought the Devil had least to do here; I came to say my prayers, And if it do offend you I do so, You are a fine Courtier. (36-9)

Bosola, unlike Antonio, is always ready with a slick answer; this one is a masterful stroke. All that Antonio can manage is that he had consulted an astrologer about finding the Duchess' stolen jewels. After some verbal fencing between the two about the supposed theft of the jewels, Antonio is suddenly struck with a nosebleed, one of the things Delio has noted as an ominous sign to the superstitious. The import of this occurrence is not lost on Antonio; but more important, in the confusion of securing his handkerchief, he drops his son's newly cast horoscope. He further warns Bosola, then exits on a sententious statement about the similarity of the great and the simple, a saw which echoes Bosola's earlier speech (II, 1, 99-109). Bosola retrieves the lost horoscope and reads it; the Duchess is found out. Bosola thinks that

36 For the dramatic quality of this scene, see M. C. Bradbrook, "Two Notes upon Webster," Modern Language Review, XLII (1947), 281-294.

37 Lucas notes that the horoscope is "appalling," but that this child is the only one of the family who survives (II, 151, n. 91) -- a neat stroke of irony.
Antonio is the Duchess' bawd and that the father will be discovered eventually but resolves to dispatch Castruchio to Rome immediately with this piece of intelligence. This whole piece of business about the horoscope is Webster's invention and a dramatically sound one. The scene ends with another of the sententia, this one a comment on the fact that love is foolish and is always found out.

The fourth scene shifts to Rome, the palace of the Cardinal. After identifying this scene shift by having the Cardinal ask Julia what excuse she has given her husband for coming to Rome, Webster has the Cardinal launch into a diatribe about the infidelity of women, a Websterian theme of long standing. The prelate's accusation that Julia is "...a witty false one" (7)\textsuperscript{38} is an echo of Bosola's saw at the end of the previous scene. This echo calls attention to Julia's function as a foil to the Duchess, for Bosola's allusion was to the Duchess. Julia's promiscuity and faithlessness are contrasted to the Duchess' honor and fidelity. The sub-plot of the Cardinal and Julia is integrated into the main action of the play in the last act through the Julia-Cardinal-Bosola relationship. Duplicity of lovers is also emphasized in this scene, for both Julia and the Cardinal assure each other of undying love, but by the end of the play Julia has flung herself at Bosola and the Cardinal has admitted that Julia has begun to pall. In Webster, things are rarely what they seem. The scene between the lovers

\textsuperscript{38} This is, of course, a commonplace expression. Beaumont and Fletcher used it as the title of a play.
is ended by the arrival of Delio. Delio first baits Julia about her foolish husband (who she has learned is in Rome); then they hear that the news that Castruchio has delivered to Ferdinand has driven the Duke into a frenzy. But Delio finally states his business to Julia: he gives her money, then after the interruption of the servant with the news about Ferdinand asks her to be his mistress. Her cryptic reply, "Sir, I'le go aske my husband if I shall," (97) perhaps puzzles Delio. He doesn't know whether she is being coy or honest. Lucas suggests that Delio asks Julia to be his mistress so that he can better know what the Duchess' brothers are doing. This interpretation certainly would fit in well with the reason for his going to Rome and is the sort of duplicity that is common in Webster, but nothing more is heard of the proposition. Another interpretation, then, is as follows. Delio has given Julia money and intends it as a bribe to extract information her in just the same way that Bosola was hired by Ferdinand. But before he can make plain his intent, the servant enters with the lines concerning the effect of Castruchio's news upon the Duke. Thinking better, then, of such an overt offer, the quick-thinking Delio merely makes a ridiculous offer so that suspicion will not be thrown on Antonio through the friendship between the two men should Julia tell the Cardinal of the offer he proposed to make. His final speech, then, about Julia's reaction to his offer that she be his mistress is delivered

39 Lucas, II, 156, n. 98.
in an amused way inasmuch as her answer is of no importance anyway. With a smile he says, "Very fine --/Is this her wit, or honesty that speaks thus?" (101-2). Then he turns serious again as he exits to close the scene and expresses his fear that perhaps Antonio is already found out.

The final scene of the second act functions to show Ferdinand's coming madness and to suggest a cause of it. The action of the scene between the two brothers begins with Ferdinand's cry "I have this night dig'd up a man-drake." (1) And were there any doubt of the significance of this, his next speech is "And I am growne mad with't." (3) As the scene progresses, the Cardinal chides his brother for his extreme reaction. He tells the Duke to lower his voice (?) and says that he is a tempest (24). Later the prelate tells him that he is beyond reason (61) and that his rage is foolish (65). When asked if he too is not moved, the Cardinal responds

Yes -- I can be angry
Without this rupture -- there is not in nature
A thing, that makes man so deform'd, so beastly,
As doth intemperate anger: chide your selfe -- (73-6)

The animal quality of Ferdinand's anger prefigures his coming lycanthropy. Finally the Cardinal is moved to ask "Are you starke mad?" (86) The suggested cause of Ferdinand's choler is seen in his language: he emphasizes the physical aspect of their sister's dishonoring them. He calls her a "strumpet" (6) and a "whore" (63- and 64). He pictures her in the very act (53-5). This emphasis on the carnal and exaggerated reaction could be caused by jealousy as much as by
The final bit of evidence of this possible jealousy is Ferdinand's speech that elicits the Cardinal's shocked "Are you starke mad?" The Duke says,

...I could kill her now,
In you, or in myselfe, for I do thinke
It is some sinne in us, Heaven doth revenge
By her. (82-85)

The sin is, perhaps, in Ferdinand. The scene closes with his swearing to have his revenge as soon as he finds who it is who "leapes" (100) his sister.

As was the case between the first and second acts, there is a passage of time between the second and third acts. The time lapse between II and III is greater than the other one; the audience almost immediately learns from Antonio that he is now the father of two more children. There has been some comment that it is unreasonable that Ferdinand would swear revenge (as he does at the end of Act II) then wait so long to attempt to achieve it. He has sworn, however, to have his revenge after he has learned the name of his sister's lover. Now, finally unable to contain himself any longer, he will force the issue. Dramatically, the lapse of time does not seem great. Robert Ornstein points out that the swearing of revenge and Ferdinand's moving to action come one after another in the play; here, he explains, Webster is using two different rates of time, a fine stroke.\(^{41}\) To Ornstein's

\(^{40}\) This view of Ferdinand's motive is also presented in Elizabeth M. Brennan's article, "The Relationship Between Brother and Sister in the Plays of John Webster." MLR, LVIII (1963), 488-94.

\(^{41}\) Ornstein, p. 130.
explanation should be added Delio's speech, near the opening of the act, about his absence from Malfi:

Me thinkes 't was yester-day: Let me but winkke, And not behold your face, which to mine eye Is somewhat leaner, verily I should dreame It were within this halfe houre. (8-11)

Webster saw his problem and solved it.

The audience now learns from Antonio that Ferdinand is there at Malfi and "Doth beare himselfe right dangerously." (22) His quiet forbodes ill to Antonio, who feels that the brothers must have heard of the Duchess' children, for the offspring have become common gossip. The common people call her a strumpet; the wise politicians have concocted involved, and totally inaccurate, explanations -- an ironic jab, Lucas points out, at would-be analysts with their subtle explanations. 42

Now the audience sees again Ferdinand and the Duchess. The Duke craftily probes the situation by saying that he would like his sister to marry Count Malateste, a nonentity that the audience will see later. The Duchess informs her brother that when she marries, she will marry for his honor. Her marriage has hardly added to the honor of the family, a fact that will be discussed shortly. The Duchess does wish to discuss with her brother, however, the talk that is abroad concerning her. Ferdinand disarms his sister with another piece of duplicity. He says

...my fix'd love
Would strongly excuse, extenuate, nay deny Faults, were they apparent in you; Goe be safe In your own innocency. (62-5)

42 Lucas, II, 158, n. 33-42.
The Duchess is put off her guard by this appearance, hence feels safe in confessing her marriage later.

The audience, however, is not allowed to be so taken in by Ferdinand's false appearance. Left alone on stage, Ferdinand and Bosola discuss the Duchess' situation. Bosola has heard that the Duchess has three bastards, but "by whom, we may go read i' th' Starres." (73) To Ferdinand's response that some say that the stars do give such information (astrology, like Antonio's horoscope), Bosola replies, "Yes, if we could find Spectacles to read them --" (76). There are in the imagery of the play several references to the stars and to Fortune as the guiding forces of men's lives. Unable, then, to discover by other methods the identity of his sister's lover, Ferdinand has decided to do his own investigating by means of a key to the Duchess' quarters, a key obtained by Bosola. Ferdinand, discounting Bosola's suggestion of a love potion, says, "The witch-craft lies in her rancke blood: this night/I will force confession from her..." (94-5). The Duke still emphasizes the sin of the blood. The scene ends with Bosola, the blunt malcontent, making a choral comment by telling Ferdinand that the great Duke flatters himself. The Duke's answer of thanks to Bosola for being his truthful friend is ironic in that when Bosola's service to him is completed, Ferdinand refuses to pay him.

The second scene of Act III opens with Antonio, the Duchess, and Cariola enjoying playful badinage in the Duchess' quarters. The joy and felicity of the scene contrast with the evil menace of Ferdinand in the preceding one, and the
references to love and allusions to love making in this scene contrast with the hate of the previous one. Just before Ferdinand steals in, the Duchess asks, "I pre-thee/ When were we so merry?" (60-1) Lucas suggests that this is an example of the lightness proverbially supposed to precede disaster. Here, perhaps, the fortunes of the protagonist reach their zenith, for later in the scene comes the turning point of the play and the antagonist forces achieve the ascendant. The unobserved entrance of Ferdinand while the Duchess is cheerfully prating is an excellent bit of dramatic business. In fact, the ensuing scene between the brother and sister is intensely dramatic because all of the while the audience is half expecting Antonio to come wandering innocently back in to be exposed. The Duchess' first words to her brother express a typically Websterian view. As she looks at Ferdinand, dagger in his hand, she says,

'Tis welcome
For know whether I am doomb'd to live, or die,
I can doe both like a prince. (77-9)

The Duchess' stocism will stand her in good stead later.
The Duke offers her his weapon to kill herself and accuses her of unchastity.

She confesses, then, that she is married, admitting that her choice of husband might not please him. This marriage is one of the difficulties of the play for the modern audience, to whom the Duchess is entirely innocent. But as Leech points out, to Webster's audience she was only partly innocent; by

43 Lucas, II, 161-2, n. 61.
marrying below her own station (she was of royal blood), she violated degree and order. And by marrying without the consent of her brothers, she showed a regrettable lack of restraint. The Duchess, then, suffers the flaw common to many heroes of Renaissance tragedy: she allows her passion to overrule her reason. Craig makes an excellent statement about the character of the Duchess. He points out that Webster found the Duchess completely culpable in his source. (Craig considers only Painter's Palace of Pleasure as a source.)

Being a woman, she was sensual and wanted a husband; in marrying without the consent of her brothers she sinned in not maintaining the dignity of her rank. Webster has seen in the Duchess the possibility of a more complex character. Her situation is one in which the choice of tragic deed is intelligible and human. But for our purposes the significant thing is that Webster, in order to achieve his purpose, has to create all the characters. The original author of the tale and the Elizabethans in Painter's day did not conceive of character as Webster did; they had not yet learned how.

Webster created a character in the Duchess who is neither all good nor all bad. She is loving, kind and brave but too passionate and willing to hedge the truth if hedging suits her purpose. And because her marriage was not entirely right in Renaissance eyes, there is additional motivation for the revenge that her brothers take on her. So Ferdinand is not mollified that his sister is married. His only interest in her husband is to see him dead. His language again runs to witches, and for the first time he uses the word "wolf" (105),

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45 Hardin Craig, pp. 122-3.
a word that creeps more and more often into his speech as his madness approaches. He rails and threatens, finally vowing never to see her again.

As soon as Ferdinand has left, Antonio returns with a pistol to protect his wife. As usual Antonio is full of high resolve and is well prepared when it is too late, but he must flee when Bosola enters. All unsettled moments before, the Duchess quickly comes up with a story to explain her brother's furious departure and his statement that she is undone. Understandably, she quickly recalls the story given out at the time of her first accouchement and changes it:

Antonio, she says, has cheated her and her brother. Bosola immediately senses a trick, but at her bidding goes to summon her officers. Antonio returns to hear the Duchess' plan for him to go to Ancona. There she will send her treasure. But Bosola arrives with the officers of the court before Antonio can escape; hence more subterfuge is called for. The Duchess makes a speech in which she purports to condemn him but magnanimously allows him to go. Lucas notes that there are, however, several ambiguities in the speech, pieces of neat dramatic irony. She talks of having signed his "Quietus," which the audience must recall she signed with a kiss earlier. The ambiguous part of her speech is

\[
\text{Till I had sign'd your Quietus; and that cur'de you Without helpe of a Doctor. Gentlemen,}
\]

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46 Lucas finds in this a regrettable lack of inventiveness (II, 165, n. 201 ff.).

47 Lucas, II, 166, n. 224.
I would have this man be an example to you all;
So shall you hold my favour: (224-7)

Antonio's "I am all yours..." (244) is equally ambiguous. Webster frequently works into the play such good contrasts as this. Antonio's answer to the Duchess' accusation is a speech on the mean recompense of service, a speech much like Bosola's in an earlier scene (I, 1).

To continue the subterfuge, after Antonio's exit the Duchess invites her men to abuse Antonio. The worse they can say, though, shows only their jealousy. But after the others have left, in hopes of trapping the Duchess, Bosola speaks the truth about Antonio. To each of the Duchess' brief objections, he gives a long answer citing Antonio's good points. She has, Bosola says, discarded a rare jewel, badly requited a good servant, been an ungrateful prince. The Duchess snaps up Bosola's bait; she delightedly tells Bosola that Antonio is her husband and that they are the parents of three. Bosola praises her for marrying a man for his worth rather than for his rank. This praise draws from the Duchess the rest of her story and she places Bosola in charge of conveying her treasure to Ancona. Bosola, then, appearing to be a friend, has in reality trapped the Duchess. He proposes that she escape to Ancona by feigning a pilgrimage to the shrine of Loretto. In the source this suggestion comes from the Duchess' woman. Webster has given the suggestion to Bosola because in contemporary eyes a false pilgrimage used as a cover for something else was reprehensible. Bosola hopes further to lower the Duchess' reputation.48 The Duchess'
woman, Cariola, points out that it is unwise to use religion for deception, but the Duchess is completely taken in by Bosola. After the women exit, Bosola’s soliloquy reminds the audience that he is still Ferdinand’s spy, that he intends to tell the Duke all. Although he still does not like being an "intelligencer," he expects reward for his service. This soliloquy ends the scene.

This confession by the Duchess to Bosola and his taking a hand in her planned escape is the turning point of the play. The rising action has ended and the forces of the antagonist will increasingly gain supremacy. Bosola will report to Ferdinand everything that the brothers want to know; the outcome is now assured. The Duchess and Antonio are doomed.

The short third scene functions to indicate the passage of time and to show the audience Ferdinand’s reaction to Bosola’s news. The scene opens with the Cardinal, Ferdinand and other men coming onstage in groups. Again Webster uses the convention that one group cannot hear the others’ conversation. The first to enter are the Cardinal and Malateste. As they cross with their talk of battle, they are followed by Ferdinand, Delio, Silvio, and Pescara. This second group remains at the opposite side of the stage while Delio and Silvio tell Ferdinand about the great cowardliness of Malateste, who obviously must be supposed to be out of earshot. 49

49 This apparently is the "great Count Malateste" (III, 1, 49) whom Ferdinand had suggested as a husband for the Duchess. Inasmuch as Ferdinand apparently knew little of Malateste, he must have offered the first name that came to his mind.
When Bosola enters (42), Ferdinand detaches himself from the larger group and crosses to join Bosola and the Cardinal while Delio describes Bosola as a student at Padua. (There Bosola had yet another guise: he was the pedant, trying to learn all manner of esoteric information.) As Bosola relates to the brothers his latest information, Pescara, Silvio, and Delio note and remark upon the awful looks of the brothers. Then the dialogue switches to the brothers and Bosola. The Cardinal had intended to go to Loretto for the ceremony of resigning his Cardinal's hat so that he could again become a soldier. Bosola and Ferdinand will ride to Loretto with some of Ferdinand's men but not, Ferdinand says ominously, to attend his brother's ceremony. The Cardinal will also arrange to have his sister and her husband banished from Ancona.

The brief fourth scene presents in dumb show (a device apparently pleasing to the Renaissance audience), with choral comments from two pilgrims, the Cardinal's ceremony and the banishment of the Duchess and Antonio from Ancona. The comment of the First Pilgrim that despite the Duchess' demeaning marriage "...the Cardinall/Beares himself much too cruell." (27-8) is a choral comment introducing a brief dialogue between the two pilgrims about the injustice of the banishment of the Duchess and the seizing of her lands by the Church. The wedding ring that the Cardinal wrenches from her finger is, evidently, the one that turns up later on the "dead man's hand." The function of the fourth scene, then, is that it moves the falling action and presents choral
comments so that the audience will not lose sight of the fact that the Duchess is not so blameworthy as her brothers feel her to be.

In the final scene of the third act, Webster continues to build up the characters of his protagonists as he had done by means of the pilgrims in the previous scene. The Duchess and her family, having learned that there can be no sanctuary in Ancona, receive the next blow with the arrival of Bosola to deliver a letter from Ferdinand. But the Duchess realizes that the letter is couched in equivocal terms, therefore refuses to heed its invitation for Antonio to go to the Duke. Antonio, following his Duchess' lead, refuses to go. After Bosola leaves with this answer, the Duchess and Antonio plan their next move; they will separate, Antonio taking the eldest child to Milan. The Duchess, feeling more and more the hand of Fate in her woes (92-5), parts from her husband. She is immediately taken by Bosola. Again she refers to Fortune (112-3), for Fortune, the stars, fate are dominating aspects of the play. Bosola has taken on another guise for this business; he is masked, and his views have altered radically. He abuses Antonio as base born, a complete change of his view expressed earlier to the Duchess. She, her spirit now on the ascendant as her fortunes droop, answers the masked Bosola with "Were I a man: I'll'd beat that counterfeit face, into thy other --" (141-2). When Bosola tells her that her

50 Here Webster departs from his sources, telescoping the events for dramatic effect. See Lucas, II, 10.
brothers have pity for her, she spits the word "Pitie!" (129) back into his face. In answer to Bosola's question of whether her children can speak yet, she says

No:
But I intend, since they were borne accurs'ed;
Curses shall be their first language. (136-8)

The act closes with the Duchess' telling of a parable to Bosola; the intent of it is to build up Antonio's character to the audience, but the little story seems rather ineffec-
tive. In fact, the story about fish is perhaps all too appro-
priate for Antonio. The Duchess has now begun to rise to her natural heights of dignity, spirit and integrity. In these regards she is becoming more like Vittoria; in the face of adversity, as Bosola leads her prisoner, her fierce spirit rises.

Act IV contains the emotional climax of the play: the murder of the Duchess. The murder is preceded by the increas-
ingly horrible persecution of the Duchess by Bosola, the mad-
men, the executioners and Bosola as the Bellman. The act closes, however, with Bosola turning avenger. The act opens with Bosola describing to Ferdinand the Duchess' behavior in prison: like Byron's prisoner of Chillon, she would welcome death as a release from her suffering. Yet she maintains a noble reserve. Ferdinand, distressed at her disdainful forti-
tude, decides to take another step in her persecution. He visits her in the dark (having vowed never again to see her) and raises her ire almost immediately by referring to her children as "Cubbs" (40). Ferdinand's mind is moving more and more toward his final madness which is foreshadowed again
in the Duchess' line that he will "...howle in hell for't." (47) Then Ferdinand, in a speech full of double meanings, presents her with the wax hand. He leaves and with the lights brought back, the Duchess is shown the wax figures of Antonio and the child as if dead. At the sight of this horror, so dear to the hearts of Renaissance audiences, and of many Renaissance dramatists as well, apparently, the Duchess wishes more devoutly for death; but her spirit isn't broken. Bosola now begins to feel for her, "Now, by my life, I pitty you." (103) But pity she disdains as she does life; when Bosola tells her that he will save her life, she disdainfully answers, "Indeed I have not leysure to tend to so small a business." (102) And to the servant who wishes her long life, she says, "I would thou wert hang'd for the horrible curse/Thou has given me." (110-1) This speech of the Duchess' ends with the lead in to the famous passage of cursing the stars:

I'll goe pray: No,
I'll goe curse:
Bos. Oh Fye!
Duch. I could curse the Starres.
Bos. Oh Fearful!
Duch. And those three smyling seasons of the yeere
Into a Russian winter: nay the world
To its first Chaos.
Bos. Looke you, the Starres shine still: (112-20)

51 It has been pointed out by M. C. Bradbrook that a dead man's hand was a charm used to cure madness. Webster's employment of it here is ironic, for it is the mad Ferdinand who gives the hand. ("Two Notes Upon Webster," 283-4.)

52 The stage direction at line 66 reads "...the artificale figures of Antonio, and his children; appearing as if they were dead. Lucas suggests that "children" be emended to "child." "The Duchess of Malfi" Times Literary Supplement, July 13, 1956, p. 423.
Bosola's cynical taunting reaches its epitome in the magnificent last line above. He sums up in six words Webster's -- the Jacobean's -- melancholy at man's fate, his insignificance, in an indifferent, sometimes hostile, universe. The stars, fortune, are totally uncaring. Then, cursing her brothers, the Duchess exits.

Ferdinand returns to close the scene with Bosola. The Duke explains that the end of his cruelty is to drive his sister mad. Bosola objects, saying she now should be sent a rosary, prayer books and a hair shirt to wear "Next to her delicate skinne." (144) The reference to skin sets the Duke off on one of his speeches colored by the possibility of incest:

Damme her, that body of hers,
While that my blood ran pure in't was more worth
Then that which thou would'st comfort, (call'd a soule)
(146-8)

Granted the Duke's madness is rapidly approaching, he still values rather too highly his sister's body. He will, he says, torture her with madmen. Bosola, when told that he must see her again, resolves to see her only if he is disguised. Further, he must go to Milan to find Antonio, Ferdinand tells him.

53 Hibner, however, suggests that the stars represent the permanence of nature and therefore symbolize "...hope which defeats the feeling of despair which the horrors of the play may generate." (Jacobean Tragedy, p. 111)

54 It is suggested by Elizabeth M. Brennan in her edition of the play that the garment suggested by Bosola might imply that the Duchess be punished as an adulteress, adulteresses being required by the ecclesiastical courts to walk through the streets wearing a penitential garment of white. (Elizabeth M. Brennan, ed., The Duchess of Malfi (New York, 1966) pp. 111-2.)
The second scene of the fourth act brings the emotional climax of the play: the murder of the Duchess. The murder is built up to by the madmen scene which shows the disintegration of the Duchess' world. The scene opens with the Duchess and Cariola hearing the noise of the approaching madmen. The audience sees right away that Ferdinand's final stratagem will not work: silence, not noise, will drive the Duchess mad. She stoically awaits their arrival. When Cariola asks her what she thinks of, the Duchess responds "Of nothing." (17) It is just before the entrance of the mad crowd that the Duchess hopelessly delivers the speech previously noted which echoes her words to her husband on their wedding night: "And Fortune seems only to have eiesight, To behold my tragedy:" (37-38).

The madmen present an entire world of appearance as opposed to reality. Though there is a hint of their previous connections with the real world in their speeches, they are the Duchess' curse of "...the world/To its first Chaos." (IV, i, 118-9) come to pass. Ekeblad points out that the wild

55 Lucas, who in his enormously helpful notes to the plays, points out parallels in the works, misses this echo of Flamineo's speech in WD, V, vi, 203.


57 Although madmen are often used as a comic device on the Renaissance stage, they also serve other functions. Leech, John Webster, p. 84, points out that madness is sometimes used "...as an image of unrelieved and terrible chaos...." Others take the mad scene to be just another of the horrors that Ferdinand visits upon the Duchess. See S. I. Hayakawa,
dance and incoherent speeches of the madmen visually symbolize the disunity and incoherence of the Duchess' world and that the scene contrasts with the happiness and unity of the wooing scene. It might be added that the Duchess' speech echoing the wooing scene draws attention to the contrast. The imagery of the madman's initial song is bestial; "As Ravens, Schrich-owles, Bulls, and Beares," (69) he sings. And there is much animal imagery in their subsequent speeches. This bestiality both emphasizes the treatment that the Duchess is receiving and prefigures Ferdinand's coming lycanthropy. That the madmen episode leads up to the Duchess' death is made clear by the end of the initial song: "We'll sing like Swans, to welcome death,/And die in love and rest." (75-6) After the madmen's speeches, full of references to death and adultery, comes the wild dance of the madmen; then Bosola enters. Again he is disguised, this time as the figure of Time, an old man, the maker of the Duchess' tomb. The Duchess thinks that this must be another of the madmen, but Bosola quickly disabuses her of this notion. When the Duchess, in order to test his sanity, asks him if he knows her, he answers in a long speech couched in terms of death and the disintegration of the body. He addresses her as if she were already dead. The Duchess, not at all intimidated by Bosola's

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speech, repeats her question: "Am not I, thy Duchesse?" (132) Bosola answers this time with a speech about the apparent ill life that the Duchess has led as reflected in her dissipated appearance. This speech ends with the suggestion that the Duchess is an "unquiet bed-fellow," (138) another echo of the wooing scene. The Duchess is not, however, frightened by Bosola. Retaining her dignity, she answers "I am Duchesse of Malfy still." (139) The effect of the tomb maker on her is, in fact, quite the opposite of its intent. In questioning him about her tomb, she grows a "little merry." (148)

The next step in the attempt to break the Duchess' growing composure is the bringing in of the executioners with a coffin, cords and a bell. "Here," says Bosola, "is a present from your Princely brothers," (164) but the Duchess remains unmoved.59

Bosola next assumes the rôle of the bellman, the man sent to comfort prisoners the night before they are to be executed; he explains that his various guises are intended to bring the Duchess "By degrees to mortification." He then rings his bell and launches into a song intended to prepare the victim for execution. Even in this song of the bellman is another echo of the sweetness of the wooing scene: "Strew your haire, with powders sweete." (192) The line is reminiscent of the Duchess' "When I waxe gray, I shall have all the Court/Powder their haire, with Arras, to be like me."

59 For the madmen scene and murder of the Duchess as being like the traditional masque with the traditional giving of presents, see Ekeblad, 263-4.
(III, ii, 67-8). As the executioners prepare to go about their business, Cariola becomes loud and abusive, but the Duchess retains her dignity. Webster tempers the madness of the scene with the Duchess' very realistic and pathetic speech,

I pray — thee looke thou giv'st my little boy
Some sirrop, for his cold, and let the girl
Say her prayers, ere she sleepe. Now what please,
What death? (207-10)

Bosola continues trying to frighten her, but succeeds only in eliciting a more calm resignation, a more stoical acceptance of death. Neither death itself nor the manner of death (strangling) puts her in fear. Death finds all, one way or another and she is prepared for hers regardless of its method. This thought she expresses in the splendid lines,

I know death hath ten thousand severall doores
For men to take their Exits: and 'tis found
They go on such strange geometrical hinges,
You may open them both ways: (255-8)

death can be found by man or it can find him. After asking that her corpse be given to her women, the Duchess calmly kneels to be strangled. Unlike many other Webster characters whose deaths bring a mist, or who enter some unknown land or journey, the Duchess knows where she is going. As the executioners prepare to strangle her, she says,

Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength,
Must pull downe heaven upon me:
Yet stay, heaven gates are not so highly arch'd
As Princes pallaces -- they that enter there
Must go upon their knees. (237-41)

Cariola, in contrast, does not die well; she argues, lies, screams, bites and scratches.

With the two women murdered, Ferdinand enters to see the
carnage. Bosola, thinking to arouse some pity in the Duke, shows him the bodies of the children, apparently having them dragged onstage. Ferdinand, his mind approaching lycanthropy, answers, "The death/Of young Wolffes, is never to be pittied." (274-5) But Ferdinand is finally moved at the sight of his sister, uttering the famous line, "Cover her face: Mine eyes dazell: she di'd young." (281) Bosola, however, has been moved by all the deaths; he points out that murder cries out to heaven and answers Ferdinand's speech just quoted with "I thinke not so: her infelicitie/Seem'd to have yeeres too many." (282-3) Then he learns that he is being condemned for carrying out orders and that his only reward is to be pardoned for the atrocious act. Ferdinand equivocates that he was not judge and jury to so sentence her. The crime, he says, will be revealed by the wolf that digs up her grave, a foreshadowing of one of his own mad acts. Bosola, now having been denied reward for villainous services rendered both brothers, denounces them in much the same terms that Antonio used to describe them in the first scene of the play. They are, Bosola says, "...hollow Graves,/Rotten and rotting others." (345-6) Now that he has been twice disappointed by the brothers, Bosola undergoes a change. Webster has made clear that the main cause of this change is failure to receive reward and preferment not conscience. That Bosola has some pangs of conscience is undeniable; but had the wealth that he had expected been forthcoming, the conscience could have been controlled easily. He had not wanted to be a spy, but for money he became one. He had found the spirit and integrity
of the Duchess admirable and he pitied her and her innocent children, but for expected reward he had had them killed. Now that the reward is lost, his conscience rises from its subservient position. He tells Ferdinand that he had "... rather sought/To appeare a true servant, then an honest man." (358-9) Bosola means that he tried to appear to be a true servant to the Duchess when he was in reality a false one; had he been true to the Duchess, he would have been an honest man. Ferdinand's response convinces him; the Duke says, "I'll goe hunt the Badger, by Owle-light:/'Tis a deed of darknesse." (360-1) The "deed" not only is hunting the badger, which was thought to be a nocturnal beast, but also is the deed of murder and his deed in visiting his sister in the darkness ("Owle-light"). With this line of bestial references and apparent pointlessness, Ferdinand exits and Bosola understands. "He's much distracted:" Bosola says. "Off my painted honour! --" (362) Seeing that the Duke is as mad as the inmates sent to inflict horror on the Duchess, Bosola decides to leave his employ, to stop trying to achieve advancement under Ferdinand. He will give up the deceptive rôle he has played. Only now does his conscience, the inner man, come to the fore. Now, knowing that there is nothing in it for him, he would not do it again.

60 Lucas, II, 189, n. 360.

61 In praising Antonio to the Duchess as a man of worth rather than a man of rank, he has asked whether it is possible that a great lady has chosen a man for his worth rather than for "...these shadowes/Of wealth and painted honors?" (III, ii, 320-1).
There is a moment of final suspense when the Duchess stirs. Bosola comforts her by telling her that she had seen only wax figures of her husband and son. He would like now to be able to help, for to save the Duchess would be a measure of revenge on her brothers. But it is too late; she dies. Bosola weeps over the corpse and regrets that he had no such feelings of pity before her murder. Then recalling his promise to give her body to her women, he bears her off stage with the words that he'll ride to Milan to do something "Worth my dejection." (403) As Act IV ends, Bosola has become the revenger.

It has been commonly observed, of course, that the play suffers an anti-climax in Act V. When the Duchess is at last dead, and the worn-out Ferdinand, and the remorseful Bosola have spoken their necessary words, it is difficult for us to maintain interest in the sequence of events.62

Leech wrote this comment in a book published in 1951. At about the same time in another work, he offered a reasonable explanation for the existence of the supposedly anti-climactic fifth act of The Duchess of Malfi:

The 'justice' of the gods, as seen in tragedy, is as terrible as is their indifference: in fact, we shall not see tragedy aright unless we recognise that the divine justice mirrored in it is an indifferent justice, a justice which cares no whit for the individual.... If an evil act is committed, no matter how trifling, it will bring consequences which are far more evil than the original act....The justice of the gods consists simply in the natural law that every act must have its consequence and that the consequence will be determined by the act and its context. If the act is in any way evil or if the situation is one with evil potentialities, then a train of evil will be the result. The tragic writer believes in causation, in the doctrine that means determine ends, and in the

62 Leech, John Webster, p. 65.
powerlessness of the human will to interrupt a chain of disasters. 63

The train of circumstances begun by the Duchess' marriage had to be concluded; heavenly justice had to be served, and not only did heavenly justice have to be served, but also poetic justice had to be served. As Parrott and Ball point out, the audience demanded that the malefactors be punished. 64 Another consideration of the value of the last act is Bogard's view that it completes the revelation of man's world, of the place of death in the world. It "...shows what happens in a world where good is dead and integrity is absent." 65 To Ellis-Permor the last act gives the audience opportunity to make deductions, to draw conclusions from the play. 66 Ribner, too, sees the last act as an integral part of the play; it is a part of the thematic statement. In it we see, he says, the effect of the triumph of the human spirit in spite of the destruction of the body. 67 The last act of the play, then, is one in which the various threads of the falling action are woven together in the pattern of the denouement. And it is a sort of obligatory scene, for Webster's audience demanded retribution. Finally, the action of the tragedy is incomplete without the deaths of the antagonists, of their agent and of Antonio, who initiated the chain of events by his presumptuous violation of

64 Parrott and Ball, p. 229.
65 Bogard, p. 140.
66 Ellis-Permor, The Jacobean Drama, pp. 39-44.
order in marrying the Duchess. It is, perhaps, too long, for the suspense wanes at times.

Act V opens with Antonio and Delio discussing the possible reconciliation of Antonio with his brothers-in-law. As was mentioned previously, here is Delio's function as foil to Antonio. Antonio, though he has endured continuing persecution at the hands of the brothers, wonders about his hope of reconciliation with them. As aware as Antonio should be of the brothers' intent, Delio says "I misdoubt it," (2) and continues that their overtures to Antonio appear to be a trap. He points out that they have had Antonio's land seized, depriving him of his living. Antonio responds, "You are still an heretique/To any safety, I can shape my selfe." (13-4) This response is certainly not lacking in courage, only in wisdom.

Delio, when he sees Pescara approach, proposes that he petition to Pescara for a parcel of Antonio's land. Pescara denies Delio, then gives the piece for which Delio has asked to Julia. Pescara's explanation to Delio for denying his suit is a choral comment on what is happening to Antonio:

Do you know what it was?  
It was Antonio's land: not forfeyted  
By course of lawe; but ravish'd from his throate  
By the Cardinals entreaty: it were not fit  
I should bestow so maine a peece of wrong  
Upon my friend: 'tis a gratification  
Only due a Strumpet: for it is injustice. (46-52)

Antonio as well as the audience learns from this. From Pescara it is also learned that a story is about that the Duke Ferdinand is mad though the official report is that his illness is

68 The Duchess has already steered Antonio away from one such trap.
physiological. Delio, in his rôle of Antonio's confidant, asks Antonio what he intends to do. Antonio says that having nothing to lose other than "a poore lingring life" (70), he will go to the Cardinal that night in hope of effecting a reconciliation; through Antonio's obvious "love, and dutie," (77) the hate may be drawn from the Cardinal. Should this attempt fail, he says, he will die all at once instead of by degrees. The scene ends, then, with Antonio, always hopeful despite all the evidence, proposing to have a final interview with the Cardinal. At this point, though, there seems little else that he can do.

Scene 11 opens with a view of Ferdinand's madness. It is ironic justice that Ferdinand, who tried to drive his sister mad, is now himself mad. Though the antics of the Duke are less frightening than those of the madmen of Act IV, and though his madness could have seemed comic to some in Webster's audience, it is frightening to see the powerful fallen so low. Furthermore, his madness conforms generally to Renaissance psychology. Reed says of his insanity,

The duke, now brooding and jealous, now irascibly explosive, obviously suffers from the compound of two principal humors, melancholy and choler, long before he is actually mad. In each case, furthermore, a pronounced shock is necessary to incite the particular humor to an uncontrollable passion.69

The news of the Duchess' child is such a shock and the shock of seeing his sister dead sets him off into madness. He goes into lycanthropia, a psychosis recognized in the Renaissance as caused by melancholy, continues Reed, and

69 Reed, pp. 85-6.
Webster follows well Burton's description of the disease in Ferdinand's wild madness. Ferdinand's madness is theatrically effective and, because he is now an unnecessary complication, Webster can use the madness to remove him from the action until the final scene.

The Cardinal knows what has driven his brother mad; therefore when he is asked the cause of the madness, he must again put out a false appearance. "I must faigne somwhat!" (88) he says in an aside, then recites the tale of the ghost of an old woman, murdered by her nephews for her wealth, who appeared to Ferdinand and literally frightened him out of his wits. Even the story the Cardinal tells is based on family murder and avarice.

The Duke and the others, except the Cardinal and Bosola, exit leaving the way open for the beginning of the final series of events leading up to the denouement. The Cardinal, naturally enough, doesn't want Bosola to know of his complicity in ordering the Duchess' death; therefore he asks Bosola for news of her. And to throw Bosola further off the track, the Cardinal offers to make him anything he wants if he will do one job for the Cardinal. Bosola, well practiced at putting on a false appearance, immediately agrees. Before the prelate can name the job, Julia interrupts to call the Cardinal to dinner. Seeing Bosola, she says in an aside "What an excellent shape hath that fellow!" (125) Webster

70 Ibid., pp. 86-9. Elizabeth Brennan points out in her article on brother-sister relationships that it was thought that love could cause lycanthropla (Brennan, 493-4). Obviously, this fact emphasizes the possibility of Ferdinand’s having incestuous feelings for his sister.
has prepared for Julia's suddenly being attracted to Bosola by having characterized her as a wanton, and her attraction for Bosola is another step toward the ultimate resolution. After Julia's exit the Cardinal offers Bosola advancement for killing Antonio, even suggesting ways for Bosola to find his victim. Bosola's response is ambiguous: "I would see that wretched thing, Antonio/Above all sightes i'th'world." (148-9) After the Cardinal exits, Webster reminds the audience through Bosola's soliloquy that Bosola's appearance to the Cardinal is a false one. Bosola suspects the Cardinal of duplicity and will use him to find Antonio, whom Bosola wants to help.

The next piece of action is between Bosola and Julia. Julia, with amorous speeches and double-entendres, tells Bosola of her desire for him. He responds to her advances, then realizes that perhaps he can use her; therefore he offers her more encouragement, asking her whether the Cardinal would be angry at him should he learn of the affair. Julia assures him that inasmuch as she was the aggressor, the Cardinal would be angry at her. Then, as if to prove herself the aggressor, she invites Bosola to ask something of her. This is all the invitation Bosola needs; he asks her to discover the cause of the Cardinal's melancholy. Julia agrees to do so immediately and hides Bosola just before the Cardinal re-enters. This action, especially the hiding of Bosola, is the sort of tricky business that would please the audience.

The Cardinal first calls to his servants to allow no one to see his brother. In an aside he tells the audience
that he fears that Ferdinand may, in his madness, reveal
their hands in their sister's death. He concludes the aside
with a comment that he is tired of Julia and would like to be
rid of her.

Yond's my lingering consumption;
I am weary of her; and by any means
Would be quit off. (244-6)

This, then, is the reason for his allowing Julia to wheedle
from him the information about his complicity in the Duchess'
death and in the deaths of her children. Julia is understand­
ably shocked by the confession, a predictable reaction.71 The
Cardinal then swears her to secrecy by having her kiss a
poisoned Bible, a nicely ironic touch.72 Like others in
Webster, she dies going into a mist: "I go,/I know not
whither." (315-6)

Bosola reveals himself to the Cardinal and though he
bluntly tells the Cardinal that he doesn't trust him, agrees
to continue in their plot against Antonio and agrees to remove
the body of Julia in the dark of night. The Cardinal gives
him a master key so that he can come to collect Julia's body.
The Cardinal leaves after they have come to their supposed
agreement and Bosola again soliloquizes. Again the audience
hears a choral comment on the dangers of dealing with such a
man as the Cardinal and also hears a reminder that Bosola is

71 Lucas feels that Julia's agitation indicates that she
still loves the Cardinal. Such a confession, however, would
understandably cause agitation. See Lucas, II, 193, n. 294ff.

72 This method of murder is reminiscent of the manner in
which Brachiano's wife was dispatched in The White Devil.
Isabella kissed a poisoned picture of her husband.
still only appearing to be in league with the prelate. It may be, he says, that he will join Antonio in seeking revenge. The scene closes with Bosola again revealing his guilty conscience, his remorse over the death of the Duchess. His penitence will be revenge, his and hers.

Scene iii is the echo scene, one little noted by commentators on the play but called by Lucas a scene of "...shimmering, unearthly beauty." There are, certainly, some lovely lines of poetry in the scene, lines such as Antonio's expression of feeling for ruins (10-20), or his lines when the echo says that he'll never again see his wife:

I mark'd not one repetition of the Echo
But that: and on a sudden, a cleare light
Presented me a face folded in sorrow. (55-7)

But beautiful poetry does not make a scene dramaturgically sound. First the scene affords a brief moment of final suspense before the crashing denouement of the last two scenes. Its beauty and quiet also contrast with the preceding and following scenes though this scene does have an air of foreboding. Finally, the scene presents something of the ghost convention of revenge tragedy in reverse. The echo is almost like the ghostly voice of the Duchess. Antonio says of it, "'Tis very like my wifes voyce." (32) And later he says that he will not talk to it, "For thou art a dead Thing." (49) But the ghostly voice warns Antonio against going to the Cardinal instead of urging him to revenge like a ghost of the tradition. The echo of the voice of the Duchess

73 Lucas, II, 195, n. 21.
from the grave continues the motif of solicitude for and protection of her husband. Delio in the first speech of the scene has suggested the ghostly nature of the echo, saying,

So plaine in the distinction of our words,
That many have supposed it is a Spirit
That answeres. (7-9)

And this spirit warns Antonio not to go to the Cardinal (37), to be mindful of safety (40). "O Flye your fate" (45), it warns, or "Thou art a dead Thing." (50) Antonio, however, his courage mounting in adversity, will keep his resolve to see the Cardinal.

The denouement of the tragedy begins to come quickly in the fourth scene and the scene presents several comments on the dominant themes of the play. First, the Cardinal ironically sets the stage for his own death in the fifth scene by eliciting a promise from all the courtiers that no matter what noise they hear, they will keep to their rooms. He says in a soliloquy that he wants to be assured of privacy when Julia's body is removed -- hence the promise from the courtiers. What he gets, of course, is privacy for his own murder. But the last words of his speech, that Bosola must be killed after he has finished his service, are overheard by Bosola, whose entrance coincides with the Cardinal's exit. Then Ferdinand flies across the stage muttering, in his madness, about strangling. Bosola, briefly alone on the stage, offers one of the sententia, this one a sort of summary of the view from which revenge tragedy grows:

"We value not desert, nor Christian breath,"
When we know blacke deedes must be cur'd with death.\textsuperscript{74}
\((44-5)\)

When Antonio enters, Bosola, understandably unnerved, stabs him, thinking him to be an assassin sent by the brothers. The dying Antonio, when asked by Bosola who he is,\textsuperscript{75} answers

\begin{verbatim}
A most wretched thing,
That onely have thy benefit in death,
To appeare my selfe.
\end{verbatim}

Now all Antonio's pretences and lies are at an end; he no longer must try to appear what he is not. He is basically honest and deception has been difficult for him. Bosola has given him the benefit of death in which he can be himself. Soon appearances will no longer be necessary for any of the major characters in the play; all have found, or soon will find, reality in death. Bosola's shock at having mistakenly killed the man whom he had bound himself to save is expressed in a speech reminiscent of the tenor of his line to the Duchess: "Looke you, the Starres shine still:" (IV, i, 120). He sums up the irony of man's futile schemes in the lines, "We are meerely the Starres tennys-balls (strooke, and banded/Which way please them)" (63-4). We do not control fortune, he says; fortune controls us. As he had spoken the last words heard by the dying Duchess, so Bosola speaks the last words heard by Antonio. But in the case of the Duchess, the words were

\textsuperscript{74} See Leech, Shakespeare's Tragedies, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{75} Webster's audience had to imagine that the scene was played in darkness; references such as "darke Lanthorne" (47) gave them their clue. A modern production with an artificially lighted playing area would call for a darkened stage for this scene.
of comfort and encouragement: Bosola told her that her husband and son lived. To Antonio he also speaks the truth, telling him that his wife and children are murdered. Antonio is then pleased enough to die. His words are another summation of the attitude toward life expressed in this play:

I would not now
Wish my wounds balm'd, nor heal'd: for I have no use
To put my life to: In all our Quest of Greatnes...
(Like wanton Boyes, whose pastime is their care)
We follow after bubbles, blowne in th' ayre.
Pleasure of life, what is't? Onely the good hours
Of an Ague: meerely the preparative to rest,
To endure vexation: (73-80)

One searches for pleasure, for happiness, for greatness; but the good is only a small part of life. Antonio's last words are much like those of Vittoria (WD, V, vi, 261). He says, "And let my Sonne, flie the Courts of Princes." (84) Courts are places of corruption, corruption that can infect and can kill. Bosola closes the scene saying that he will imitate nothing either "glorious" (94) or "base" (95). "I'll be mine owne example." (95) Bosola, too, is through with disguises and he will appear henceforth as himself and as his own man as opposed to being Ferdinand's "creature."
(I, 1, 313)

The last scene of the play brings death to the antagonists and their tool and offers further comments on the central themes. The scene opens on the Cardinal reading a book,\textsuperscript{76} but he cannot concentrate on it because of his conscience.

\textsuperscript{76} Lucas notes that characters with books in their hands are common in the revenge plays (II, 195, s.d.). He fails to note that the reason for this is that carrying a book about is indicative of melancholy (See Spencer, p. 531).
He puts the book down, saying, "Lay him by: How tedious is a guilty conscience!" (4) The first part of the line foreshadows one of the Cardinal's dying speeches later in the scene: "And now, I pray, let me/Be layd by, and never thought of." (112-3) His speech about conscience continues as he describes an hallucination:

When I looke into the Fish-ponds, in my Garden, Methinkes I see a thing, arm'd with a Hake That seems to strike at me. (5-7)

Here his musing is interrupted by the entrance of Bosola. Bosola warns the Cardinal that he has come as the arm of justice to execute him. The Cardinal calls for help, but he is caught by his own strategem; no one will come to his aid because of the promise he has elicited. Webster has planned well enough for the Cardinal's self-ensnaring. When Pescara finally decides that the Cardinal's cries sound real, it is too late. Bosola kills the servant, then wounds the Cardinal, who cries for mercy. Unlike the Duchess and Antonio, he does not die stoically in the manner so admired by Renaissance audiences. Before the Cardinal dies, Ferdinand bursts in, gibbering madly. In the confused fight that ensues, Ferdinand gives the Cardinal his death wound, and Ferdinand and Bosola mutually inflict mortal wounds on each other. After lives filled with violence, all die wearily. Ferdinand's last two speeches are sane. In one he gives another thematic view of the world similar to the one given by Antonio in Scene iv and to be given by Bosola later in this scene: "I do account this world but a dog-kennel," (85) Ferdinand says. Then he comments on the cause of his death in the possibly incestuous
line, "My sister, oh! my sister, there's the cause on't." (90)

Bosola, though dying, is pleased that he has brought great men down with him. This fact has given his life at least some meaning. To the Cardinal, he says,

I do glory
That thou, which stood'st like a huge Pyramid
Begun upon a large, and ample base,
Shalt end in a little point, a kind of nothing. (95-8)

Bosola's satisfaction is typical of that of the revenge-villain. It is much like Lodovico's (WD, V, vi, 295-9). He explains the carnage, in fact, in a speech that begins "Revenge." (102) In this speech he refers to himself as an "Actor" (106) and in a later speech says that his killing Antonio was like something he'd often seen "In a play." (120) Such references as these emphasize the theme of appearance and reality, for a play is only appearance that seems to be real.77 Bosola's explanation of the deaths ends with his saying that he participated in all of the deaths "Much 'gainst mine owne good nature, yet i' th' end/Neglected." (107-108)

The audience is impressed with Bosola's ambiguity up to the end. He did not actually want to have a hand in the deaths of nine people, but what really rankles is that he was never

77 Other imagery drawn from the theater is the Duchess' "I account this world a tedious theatre," (V, i, 99); her "For men, to take their Exits," (IV, ii, 226); and Ferdinand's

...as we observe in Tragedies
That a good Actor many times is curses'd
For playing a villaines part. (IV, ii, 307-9)

This last was addressed to Bosola and meant to apply to him.
paid. His final speech expresses again the view of the world found through the entire play.

Oh this gloomy world,
In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,
Doth (womanish and fearfully) mankind live! (124-6)

Delio's mitigating speech about building something better on these ruins does little to relieve the tragic gloom of what has gone before. Delio's final two lines which end the play, are another sententious saying which offers the audience a comment on the Duchess: "Integrity of life, is fame's best friend, Which nobly (beyond Death) shall crowne the end." (145-6) The Duchess more than the other principals in the play tried to appear to be what she really was. In this consisted her integrity of life.

Starting from a source that presented few details of character and motivation, Webster constructed a tragedy in the revenge tradition that can bear close inspection and be found to be dramaturgically sound. The opening exposition characterizes the principals to a great enough extent for the actions of these characters to be understandable. Further characterization comes from seeing them in action. Briefly sketching in the background, Webster adeptly mingles exposition and rising action through the first scene. In the second scene he builds to the exciting force at the end of Act I. In Acts II and III he builds the rising action through several complications to the turning point that comes midway.

78 Although Bosola is offered money by the Cardinal to spare his life, Bosola no longer trusts the Cardinal and kills him.
through Act III. The falling action, with several turns of
fortune, occupies the rest of the play with the crashing
denouement in the last scene. Webster, though careless in a
few minor places, wrote a play which must have been appealing
to his audience and which could conceivably interest a modern
audience.79 The Websterian themes of appearance versus real-
ity and corruption of courts and of those associated with
courts, especially women, are emphasized. Finally the overall
gloomy mood of the play and expressions of the worthlessness
and baseness of human life emphasize another theme. Although
the Duchess was herself a force for good, she produced no
lasting good.

79 For a survey of twentieth century productions, most of
which have failed, see Moore, pp. 151-60.
The last independent work of Webster's is *The Devil's Law-Case*. The date of this play is apparently about 1620.¹ Turning from his practice in the two earlier plays in which he transformed Italian novelle into plays, Webster apparently worked from no source in this play; it is, according to Stoll, his first attempt at free invention.² It could be said that this play is Webster's only attempt at free invention, but there are several parallels, perhaps sources, for two of the incidents in the play: the law-case itself and the accidental performance of the life-saving operation.³ The other great difference between *The Devil's Law-Case* and the other two plays is that this one is a tragi-comedy. And the dramaturgy of this dramatic genre is somewhat different from that of the tragedy. The construction of the tragi-comedy is, in general, somewhat looser than that of the tragedy. Doran points out that of the several kinds of tragi-comedy, all share the characteristic of "...clever management of plot so that a surprise recognition or change of heart brings about a dramatic reversal from extreme peril to good fortune."⁴

¹ For the dating of the play, see Lucas, II, 213-6 and J. R. Brown, "The Date of John Webster's *The Devil's Law-Case*," *N & Q*, n.s. V (1958), 100-1.


⁴ Doran, pp. 186-7.
The Devil's Law-Case is the kind of tragi-comedy that combines the serious action of tragedy with the happy ending of comedy; it is the sort of play that today would probably be called a melodrama. Though it is not so good a play as either of the two tragedies, it is not so bad a play as some, Haworth, for example, have said: "The Devil's Law-Case is a total failure as a work of art." The play suffers from weaknesses of characterization and of motivation, weaknesses common to much Renaissance comedy. And these are weaknesses to which Webster was all too prone. Although this play is inferior to the two great revenge tragedies in structure, in characterization and in poetry, it is an interesting piece of work, giving a cynically comic view of some of the dominant themes of the tragedies and presenting again Webster's most interesting character, the melancholy man.

The first scene of the play presents some of the major characters, gives some exposition and begins the complex complications of the plot. The scene opens with Prospero and Romelio, the protagonist, discussing wealth and Romelio's wealth especially. Romelio is so wealthy that he accounts a man with fifty thousand ducats to show for thirty-seven years' work a beggar. If he did not send his silver to the East Indies to pay for his goods, he would be glutted with it; only gold he keeps. Ironically, however, he says,

Never in my life
Had I a losse at Sea. They call me on th' Exchange,

5 Haworth, p. 75.
The Fortunate Young Man, and make great suite
To venture with me: he is soon to learn that he has been wiped out by a shipwreck. Without a bald statement, Webster shows us Romelio's attitude toward money. Of Contarino who is announced by a servant, Romelio says that nobility is nothing if there is no money behind the title. Therefore, though Contarino is an honorable man of ancient family who truly loves Romelio's sister, Romelio tells Prospero that he intends to prevent a marriage between Contarino and Jolenta: he wants no impecunious brother-in-law -- title and antiquity of name be damned.

6 This speech ends with Romelio's asking Prospero a question:

Shall I tell you Sir,
Of a strange confidence in my way of Trading?
I reckon it as certaine as the gaine
In erecting a Lotterie. (14-7)

But Prospero blithely ignores the question and asks Romelio what he thinks of Baptista's estate. (It is Baptista whom Romelio accounts to be no better than a beggar.) Romelio's question is then forgotten. Is this an example of Webster's inattention to detail? Or could this be an error which should be corrected by placing the question after "Had I a losse at Sea."? Then the passage would read more logically:

Never in my life
Had I a losse at Sea. Shall I tell you Sir,
Of a strange confidence in my way of Trading?
I reckon it as certaine as the gaine
In erecting a Lotterie. They call me on th' Exchange,
The Fortunate Young Man, and make great suite
To venture with me.

Could the printer have transposed lines? A third conjecture is that Prospero is not interested in hearing confidences, hence changes the subject.

7 Webster expresses an attitude much like Romelio's in the Dedication of The Duchess of Malfi.
This, then, is the initial characterization of the protagonist. Romelio is avaricious but despises prodigality. His attitude toward wealth is comparable to that of Marlowe's Jew of Malta, a character that perhaps influenced Webster's creation of Romelio. But this is only a part of Romelio's character; other aspects are gradually revealed. The audience is yet to see Romelio the melancholy Machiavel, the extension of Flamino and Bosola. And some of the best lines of poetry in the play are given to this scheming merchant; underneath there is a man of some feeling.

The character of Prospero, who appears with Romelio to open the play, is somewhat anomalous: he has various functions in the play and sometimes no function at all. In this first scene he serves to introduce Romelio, but in a way his function is also rather chorus-like, for he gives the audience viewpoint of some of Romelio's attitudes. For example, when Romelio says that he will break up the romance of Contarino and Jolenta, Prospero says

You are ill advised then;  
There lives not a compleater Gentleman  
In Italy, nor of a more ancient house. (37-9)

In II, ii, he serves as a chorus to comment on dueling and in V, iv, he gives a chorus-like comment on honor. In V, ii, however, he appears with no function; he is simply the character who gives Sanitonella the opportunity to make another comment on lawyers.

When Contarino enters, he asks Romelio about a proposed

8 In III, ii, Romelio disguises himself as a Jewish physician.
sale of a piece of land. Contarino is selling off his lands to raise money and Romelio is the proposed buyer. Romelio asks if Contarino needs the money for travel and when Contarino says no, Romelio urges travel upon him as broadening for a nobleman. Contarino responds that he has heard of many

...that in passing of the Alpes,
Have but exchang'd their vertues at deare rate
For other vices. (64-6)

Lucas notes that the audience would think of crossing the Alps southward, for many Renaissance Englishmen complained of the immorality of the Italians. But the ironic twist of having a Neapolitan fearful of losing his virtue by traveling to more northerly countries is not unlike Webster. Contarino confesses to Romelio why he needs money: he must pay some debts and he plans to marry. He begins to hint that he wishes to marry Jolenta and finally asks Romelio's consent. Romelio does not want a debt-ridden brother-in-law, but he puts on the appearance of being delighted by the proposed match. But even in his apparent pleasure in his sister's marrying a title, he comments on money:

For this same honour with us Citizens,
Is a thing we are mainely fond of, especially
When it comes without money, which is very seldome —
(115-7)

Here is the first appearance in this play, of Webster's favorite theme of appearance versus reality, for in an aside Romelio reminds the audience that he has no intention of approving such a marriage.

9 Lucas, II, 323, n. 64.
After Romelio’s exit, Contarino comments in a soliloquy on Romelio’s vanity and on the goodness of Leonora, the widowed mother of Romelio and Jolenta. The comment on Leonora could be said to prepare for the final scene in the play with the apparent matching of Contarino and Leonora. Leonora enters and the next complication of the plot occurs. Contarino asks Leonora for her "Picture," meaning her daughter. Leonora thinks that he wants an actual painting of her; hence she is encouraged in her hope of marrying him. The whole situation in this case presents a false appearance, the falseness emphasized by the widow’s description of women preparing to sit for a painting, attempting to appear something that they are not. Just as an ironic comment was made on Romelio, so one is made on Leonora. Contarino says to her that her "...judgement/Is perfect in all things." (195-6) It is Leonora’s faulty judgment that brings the greatest complication in the play, the law case. Leonora is intended to personify a dominant theme of the play: the pride and willfulness of women. She broadly hints for a husband when she says to Contarino in reply to his comment on her perfection,

Indeed Sir, I am a Widdow,
And want the addition to make it so:
For mans Experience has still been held
Womans best eyesight. (197-200)

Her hint is hardly veiled here, and she asks no man’s advice when she hails her son into court on a dishonest charge. Leonora has wealth of her own which she bluntly offers to Contarino so that he will not have to sell more land to her son. Contarino, thinking only of his love for Jolenta, misunderstands the
offer, thinking that it is being made to a prospective son-in-law. Leonora exits, leaving Contarino to close the scene with a puzzling speech. He reads a letter from Jolenta telling him that he must visit her at midnight on an urgent matter. He decides not to wait until midnight but to go at once: "Ile thither straight." (230) But he is in her home when he says that he'll go thither. Where, then, is Jolenta?

In this first scene there is also the suggestion of an important topical allusion generally overlooked by commentators. In leading up to offering Contarino money, Leonora says

Now I could rather wish,  
That Noblemen would ever live ith Countrey,  
Rather then make their visits up to 'th Citie  
About such businesse: Oh Sir, Noble Houses  
Have no such goodly Prospects any way,  
As into their owne Land: the decay of that,  
Next to their begging Churchland, is a ruine  
Worth all mens pitie. (204-11)

Lucas notes that there was great agitation during the early seventeenth century for the nobility to remain on their estates rather than go to London. In 1617 James I issued a proclamation on the subject. And much of the blame for this abuse was placed on the pride of women, lending to the anti-feminist feeling of the play.10 There is, however, a second topical allusion in this speech. Increasingly, the nobility were losing their estates to London citizens, to the rising middle class, either through sales or through foreclosure by money-lenders. At about this time many eminent English

10 Lucas, II, 325, n. 205.
courtiers were deeply in debt; estates were pledged as security for loans and were lost. E. C. Pettet points out that Sir Philip Sidney owed £6,000, the Earl of Essex £22,000, the Earl of Huntingdon £20,000 and the Earl of Leicester £59,000. One of the chief complaints of the day was that vast estates were falling into the hands of lowborn merchants and merchant-usurers. It seems clear that Webster is alluding to this problem. The contrast between the merchant Romelio and the noble Contarino is emphasized by it.

The second scene of Act I continues the complications of the play. The scene opens with Romelio attempting, first to cajole, then to browbeat his sister into agreeing to marry Ercole. First, Romelio shows her Ercole’s commission from the King of Spain, placing Ercole in charge of thirty galleys. Jolenta remains unimpressed. She declines the honor of marrying Ercole, offering her brother several malicious comments on the commission though she has nothing to say about Ercole himself. Perhaps she does not comment on Ercole in order to spare his feelings, for he is present throughout most of the interview. Romelio, unable to understand that Jolenta loves Contarino (or thinks she loves him, for she changes her

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mind later), ascribes her adamant refusal of Ercole and stubborn insistence on Contarino to her desire for a title.

Up to the entrance of Leonora, Ercole's only comment is one of anger to Romelio; for Ercole feels that Romelio has made a fool of him in leading him to believe that the marriage would be managed easily.

With Leonora's entrance, the subject changes briefly from the Ercole-Jolenta match to Contarino, for Leonora has heard the name in the conversation as she made her entrance. Leonora tells of how Contarino lost everything including his lordship at gambling and how he nobly paid his debt. Romelio disgustedly remarks that gambling debts are debts of honor to these noble gentlemen, but they often refuse to pay their brewers. This dialogue is another comment on the profligacy of the nobility, profligacy that was a major cause of their losing their estates.

Romelio returns the subject to the arrangement of the marriage and Leonora piously advises her daughter to accept Ercole. Her duplicity is seen in her comment:

Know for your sakes
I married, that I might have children;
And for your sakes, if youle be rul'd by me,
I will never marry agen. (90-3)

But she already hopes to marry Contarino, despite the fact that she knows that her daughter loves this man and she is shortly to deny that Romelio is the son of her marriage.

Leonora shares the willfulness of her predecessors of Webster's creation, Vittoria and the Duchess, but she lacks their integrity.

Ercole attempts to do the honorable thing by retiring and leaving the choice to Jolenta, but Leonora thwarts this
Heare me, if thou dost marry Contarino,
All the misfortune that did ever dwell
In a parents curse, light on thee! (112-4)

The kneeling and swearing the curse is an effective piece of business dramatically. And it magnifies the stubborn will of the mother. Her desire for Jolenta to marry Ercole is certainly influenced by her own desire to have Contarino. Webster then uses again one of his favorite devices -- having one character bracketed in a two-pronged verbal lashing by two others. Except for two brief interruptions by Jolenta, Romelio and Leonora bombard her with arguments for her marrying Ercole. Romelio enjoys browbeating his sister; he and his mother have begun to make lewd remarks about the marriage and he turns to Ercole and says "You see my Lord, we are merry/At the Contract -- your sport is to come hereafter." (169-70) Ercole then leaves, telling Jolenta that he can wait to win her heart. Ercole functions in the play as a complicating agent and as a resolving agent. His relationships with his friend Contarino and with Jolenta add complications to the plot; then his unmasking himself at the trial and his ultimate reconciliation with his friend and his sweetheart help to bring about the resolving of the difficulties. He is depicted as a man of great honor, like his friend Contarino; but unlike Contarino, he is not a profligate. He is among the most honorable in the play, but as a dramatic character he is somewhat flat.

With the exit of Ercole and entrance of Winifred, the waiting woman, there is a change in tone in the scene. Romelio tells Winifred that Jolenta is to have no visitors, but in
talking to the servant Romelio's speech patterns change. His language becomes colloquial and he teases Winifred about having had an illegitimate child. She, he says, has been burned; therefore she is the best one to watch over Jolenta's purity. Romelio leaves and Winifred quickly shows to whom she is loyal; she conducts Contarino in to see Jolenta, who tells him of their plight. Contarino is angered that Romelio has been false to him. And he is angered that his best friend is his competitor for Jolenta. But Jolenta is fearful; therefore he calms her with kisses and protestations of love. Winifred's comment on their amorousness raises a doubt about Jolenta's chastity. "I have seen this Lord many a time and oft/Set her in's lap, and talk to her of love" (274-5) the servant says. The word "lap" frequently had sexual connotations to Webster's audience though the meaning is not necessarily sexual.13 Contarino and Jolenta agree to be married the next day and the scene closes with Contarino's promise to her that he will quarrel with no one — neither with her brother, nor her mother, nor Ercole.

The chief function of Winifred in the play is as Leonora's tool. Winifred abets the widow in the false suit brought against Romelio. In V, iii, Winifred is the messenger to the monk telling him that Contarino is still alive; in this she helps to resolve the conflicts of the play. She is basically a humorous character, open and frank in her speech but capable

of horrendous lies when called on for them. She is unchaste and participated willingly in Leonora's plot against Romelio, but she cheerfully admits that she's a liar and not to be trusted. There is in her character something of the typical servant of the comedy of this period, but there is also a lusty individual here.

The first scene of the second act introduces more characters, gives more action and adds to the complications of the plot. Crispiano and Sanitonella enter to open the scene; Crispiano is disguised. In fact, he spends most of the play disguised. The disguise is a frequent convention of Renaissance plays and it is useful to Webster in emphasizing his theme of appearance and reality. The beginning conversation between the two characters presents one of the difficulties of the play: Sanitonella's first speech seems to imply that Crispiano has been a judge in Seville, but later in the play (IV, ii, 525-9) Crispiano says that he has been in the Indies for forty years. Lucas points out that Sanitonella's remark could be interpreted to mean simply that Crispiano had practiced law, not that he had been a judge. Crispiano explains that he has come to Naples for two reasons: one is to check up on his prodigal son (hence the disguise) who is

14 See Hyde, p. 90.

15 It will be recalled that Webster employed disguised characters in both of the tragedies. For discussions of disguises in Renaissance plays, see Hyde, pp. 149-53 and Victor Oscar Freeburg, Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama (New York, 1915).

living riotously in Naples: "...but," he adds, "there is other business/Of greater consequence." (10-1) This other business comes to light later; he must inform Romelio of Romelio's losses at sea (which he does in this scene) and, more important, he is to confer the appointment to a judgeship on Ariosto (IV, ii, 494-9). Following this expository opening of introduction, Crispiano says that his son, Julio, cannot enjoy his prodigal spending of money as much as the father has enjoyed earning it. Clearly he means by this that he has loved the practice of law, for he says of its pleasures, "He shall never taste the like,/Unlesse he study law." (53-4) But Saniltonella continues to question him about the pleasures of practicing law, asking Crispiano to compare this pleasure to the pleasures of wenching and of hunting. Crispiano answers these questions in terms of the pleasure of making money through the practice of law. These answers, Lucas says, are out of character for Crispiano, who is depicted throughout the play as a man of noble purpose. Crispiano's answers could, however, be interpreted as being ironic. Seeing that Saniltonella is incapable of understanding the pleasure that the practice of law has afforded him, Crispiano descends to Saniltonella's level to answer. His final comment on the subject is ambiguous:

Come, come, leave citing other vanities:
For neither Wine, nor Lust, nor riotous feasts,
Rich clothes, nor all the pleasure that the Devill
Has ever practis'd with, to raise a man
To a devils likenesse, ere brought man that pleasure
I tooke in getting my wealth: so I conclude. (87-92)

17 Lucas, II, 331, n. 60ff.
Lawyers are among Webster's favorite targets for ridicule and satire, and whether Crispiano's words are ironic or out of character, the attack on the avarice of attorneys is clear enough. The function of Crispiano in the play is that of resolving agent; it is he who disproves Leonora's false accusation. He also is an honest judge (as is Ariosto an honest lawyer and judge) and is to be contrasted to Sanitonella and Contilupo, the dishonest lawyer and judge who pleads Leonora's case. The function of Sanitonella is largely to symbolize the underhanded practices of some attorneys.

Webster prepares for Crispiano's function as resolving agent in Crispiano's first speech of the entrance of Julio, Romelio, Ariosto and Baptista. Sanitonella identifies Romelio and Crispiano says,

...I knew his father,
And sojourn'd in his house two yeares together, 
Before this young mans birth: (98-110)

the speech concludes with the comment that he must apprise Romelio of Romelio's losses at sea. Crispiano then identifies Ariosto as an honest and capable lawyer, a man from whom he has had a visit earlier in the day. The purpose of the visit apparently was to arrange to have Ariosto berate Julio for his profligacy. Julio is told that Crispiano is the man who has brought word of the death of Julio's father. This news delights Julio, who thinks that he will now inherit the whole fortune rather than receive only an allowance. Romelio then introduces Ariosto as an old friend of Crispiano's and Ariosto begins the attack on Julio's prodigality. Romelio joins him and again Webster uses the form of dialogue in which one
character is verbally attacked by two others. The specific things laid to Julio are consorting with whores and gambling in numerous ways. Ariosto warns him that if he is not careful he will be ruined by money-lenders. So again Webster attacks abuses of his time and uses Julio, the conventional prodigal son character, to stand for them. Ariosto, in his uprightness and outspokenness, assumes a chorus-like function in the play, commenting on the follies of all the other characters in the play. As judge in the last two acts, he also helps to bring about the denouement, meting out justice to all in the last scene.

After the abuse of Julio, Crispiano and Romelio exit so that the former can tell the latter about the shipwreck. Then Ercole enters, followed almost immediately by Contarino. Left alone onstage, Contarino and Ercole engage in a very gentlemanly argument over Jolenta. Ercole denies that Romelio has helped to forward Ercole’s suit to Jolenta. The reason for this lie seems to be not only a chivalrous desire not to implicate others, but also a desire to try to do away with the adversary for Jolenta’s hand. The friendship has apparently disintegrated greatly. The argument culminates in Contarino’s challenging Ercole to a duel, a piece of stage business which apparently fascinated the Renaissance audience.  

Contarino has been false to Jolenta, for he has just promised that there would be no trouble between him and Ercole, but has apparently left her and immediately set out to find his friend

in order to gain satisfaction for Eroole's being his competitor for Jolenta. As soon as the two noblemen have left to fight, neither any longer trusting his friend, Julio and Romelio return, the latter bemoaning his loss at sea. Julio says that Contarino and Eroole have just left together and Romelio realizes that they have gone to fight. The scene closes with Romelio and Julio off to stop the duel.

Scene 11 begins with the duel, which was probably drawn out long enough to please the audience. In the course of the fight, both men are wounded and Romelio and Julio, who have attracted a small crowd in their pursuit of the combatants, find two bleeding bodies. Julio, flippant as usual, says that death is the proof of true love; hence these two have proved themselves true lovers. Prospero closes the scene with a chorus-like comment to Julio on violence: "Come, you doe ill, to set the name of valour/Upon a violent and mad despaire." (50-1)

The third scene of Act II is another complex scene, this one having three different parts, all concerning Romelio. It is a scene which shows Romelio at his cynical best, his lines crackling with brisk invective. It opens with Ariosto attempting to give a lecture on patience to Romelio, who has just learned of his great financial loss. But Romelio quickly and easily tries Ariosto's patience by asking the lawyer if he has ever watched his wife cuckold him. Having been quickly out-maneuvered in giving a lesson on patience, Ariosto says that he will talk of patience like a cleric. Romelio's response is a good example of his dialogue in this scene, dialogue that
is incisive, vitriolic and economical.

I have heard
Some talks of it very much, and many times
To their Auditors impatience; but I pray,
What practise doe they make of't in their lives?
They are too ful of choller with living honest,
And some of them not onely impatient
Of their owne sleightest injuries, but starke mad,
At one anothers preferment: now to you sir —
I have lost three goodly Carracks. (4305i)

Webster here attacks in one brief speech two of the chief complaints about the clergy, one about the Puritans and one about the Anglicans. Their anger at "living honest" is directed at the attitude of many of the zealous Puritans, who were generally thought to be hypocrites. The fury at "anothers preferment" is a reference to the competition among divines of the established church for pulpits and the holding of multiple benefices by some. (The Puritans, too, were turning out more preachers from Cambridge than there were pulpits to occupy; the surplus number apparently spent much of their time writing tracts, accounting, in part, for the large amount of Puritan writing in the seventeenth century.) When Ariosto tells Romelio that the reason for his losses at sea is that his ships were ill named, Romelio counters by saying that he should have had a cuckold at their launching, for cuckolds were thought to bring luck. Ariosto leaves telling Romelio that the next time they meet Ariosto will entreat him to be angry. This statement prefigures the trial scene in which Ariosto does just that.

The second part of the scene begins with the entrance of Leonora. She and Romelio are told by a monk that Contarino and Ercole are dead, and that because they murdered each other,
they cannot receive Christian burial. Leonora is, of course, stunned at the news that Contarino is dead. She can say only, "O, I am lost for ever." (102) But Romelio sees in the monk's statement about Christian burial an excellent opportunity to take a skeptical point of view in arguing the efficacy of a religious funeral with a monk. So he launches into his "Meditation" on burial. Lucas calls the line "I have a certaine Meditation," (111) a "naive introduction of a string of irrelevant common-places," but it is quite in character for Romelio and emphasizes the Jacobean fascination with death. A meditation was specifically a discourse, usually religious, to be used as a guide by the reader or hearer in meditating. It is wonderfully ironic that Romelio delivers such a discourse as his to a monk. The sum of the discourse is that tradesmen and the church make money from funerals, and the grave is likely to be desecrated anyway. After hearing the meditation, the monk offers Romelio sympathy for the latter's losses at sea. Romelio's reply is typical of the bravery of Webster's characters in the face of adversity: "I dare spitefull Fortune doe her worst, I can now feare nothing." (151-2)

The third part of the scene opens with Romelio's lines of pity for his sister at Jolenta's loss. Lucas notes that the lines show a quite "unexpected touch of tenderness" in Romelio. But Romelio has been ironic throughout the scene and

---19 Lucas, II, 336, n. 111.
20 Lucas, II, 337, n. 156.---
there is no reason to believe that these lines are not also
delivered with sneering irony. This last part of the scene
continues with Prospero informing Romelio and Leonora that
Contarino's will names Jolenta as the sole heir, but that
Contarino is not yet dead. Leonora's reaction is that
Contarino must be saved so that he can stand trial for
Erocle's death, she says. The falsity of her appearance is
ironically noted by Romelio when he says after she and Prospero
have departed, "Here is cruelty appareled in Kindnesse." (18?)
This line is the first of his soliloquy in which he implies
to the audience that his future depends on Contarino's
death. Romelio is the scheming Machiavel type who will
forward his own hopes in any way.

The complications of the second act are completed in
the brief fourth scene in which the audience learns that
Erocle is still alive but that he wishes to have it reported
that he is dead so that Contarino, if he lives, can have
Jolenta without opposition from Romelio. And Contarino, he
explains to the monks who accompany him, will not be punished
for his death because Contarino's family has a permanent
pardon should any member of the family kill a man in a duel.
The motivation for Erocle's sudden change in point of view is
that he now places the blame for the entire situation on
Romelio. Had not Romelio promised him that his suit to Jolenta
would be successful, he would not have essayed it and Con-
tarino would have had no competitor. And to add to Romelio's
guilt, Erocle comments that word is now about that there is a
nun pregnant by the ubiquitous merchant. And yet the noble
Ercole pities Romelio; for sin and shame must go together, he says to close the scene. Despite his noble nature, however, Ercole will also create an illusion to mask reality in his propagation of the report that he is dead.

Act III opens with a short scene between Crispiano and Ariosto. The function of the scene is to further the criticism of domineering, dishonest women who are gaining more and more power and to prepare for the trial scene in Act IV. Crispiano's last words in the scene are

Well, I have vowed,
That I will never sit upon the Bench more,
Unlesse it be to curbe the insolencies
Of these women. (17-30)

In the fourth act Crispiano does sit on the bench to curb the insolence of Leonora.

The previous two scenes have indicated the passage of time and this scene (III, i1) finds Romelio ready with his plot to insure the death of Contarino so that Jolenta will inherit. He appears disguised as a Jewish physician, a disguise which would indicate to the audience that his plot is a nefarious one, and the disguise again emphasizes the world of appearance. Romelio tricks the attending surgeons from the room by playing on their avarice; then, after a long speech emphasizing his villainy, he stabs Contarino with a needle-thin stiletto. But the surgeons, not trusting him, suddenly reappear and learn what he has done. Romelio reveals to the doctors who he is, buys their silence, and leaves. Then the audience discovers the strange reversal that marks the turning point of the play. Romelio's stiletto has opened Contarino's infected wound, an operation the doctors feared to attempt,
and has effected Contarino's recovery. Romello's last words before stabbing Contarino were ironically prophetic:

Yet this shall prove most mercifull to thee,  
For it shall preserve thee  
From dying on a publique Scaffold, and withall  
Bring thee an absolute Cure, thus. (114-7)

The surgeons close the scene ministering to Contarino and vowing to keep his recovery quiet as long as possible so that through this illusion they can further bleed Romello. This scene is an illustration in action of the irony of Webster's theme of illusion: the intended murder, tragic action, effects the cure to bring about happy denouement.

Scene iv divides into two parts, Romello's and Leonora's. In each part a plot is laid, a plot which further complicates the proceedings though the happy, or at least non-tragic outcome is assured by Contarino's recovery. The scene opens with the grieving Jolenta and Romello on a stage set with the memento morti proper to Jolenta's mourning. The situation is a dramatic irony in that the audience knows that both Ercole and Contarino live though the characters on stage talk of their deaths. Romello is in no mood for his sister's tears, for he has a plan to restore his fortune, a plan requiring her cooperation. Before describing his plot to his sister, Romello makes a comment on honesty, a comment typical of Webster and ironic coming from Romello. The Court, he says,

...Is or should be,  
As a bright Christall Mirrour to the world,  
To dresse it selfe: (14-16)

in this play the courtiers are very nearly honest; it is the citizens, Romello and his mother, who are grossly culpable. Romello's plot is to inherit Ercole's land as well as Contarino's.
To achieve this, he tells Jolenta, he will start a rumor that she and Ercole were married without benefit of clergy and that she is pregnant by Ercole. Then when his mistress, the nun Angiolella, is delivered of his offspring, the infant will be reported to be Jolenta's and Ercole's heir. He fails to tell his sister that he further plans to persuade her to enter a convent so that he will become executor of her estate and guardian of his/her child. Jolenta, naturally, at first refuses; then she tells him she really is pregnant -- by Contarino. While he is busy amending his plot to include twins, she tells him that she is not pregnant, that she was only testing him and that he did not pass the test, for he should have killed her for dishonoring his name. Romelio realizes that he must take a different approach and invents the "most unnaturall falshood:" (104) that their mother loved Contarino. Romelio, of course, does not know that this falsehood is true, another of the many ironies of the play. He embroiders this tale with details of the plan that Leonora and Contarino had for after the marriage of Contarino and Jolenta. Romelio's plot works; the vile story turns Jolenta against Contarino; she now will hold dear Ercole's memory. And she agrees, before leaving, to take part in Romelio's plot to inherit Ercole's wealth. With this plot successful, Romelio makes a comment that is indicative of one of the major themes of the play:

21 This is the same kind of marriage that the Duchess of Malfi and Antonio had and was recognized by civil authority. The church often gave its approval to this kind of union if a church ceremony followed.
...oh Jelousie,
How violent, especially in women,
How often has it rised the devil up
In forme of a law-case! (115-3)

Indeed, the speech prefigures the devil's law case that is to come though the coming one is motivated by revenge rather than by jealousy. Romelio's soliloquy continues with the summary of his plans: Jolenta will be induced to enter a convent and the two doctors who can blackmail him will be sent to the Indies where, hopefully, they will die. In the world of Jacobean tragi-comedy, it is an ingenious and workable plan. And in Webster's world of illusion, this plot is a classic stroke of illusion.

But it is workable, of course, only if Contarino and Ercole are dead. Regrettably, from Romelio's point of view, they are not. But his plan is clever and diabolical, a plan worthy of a Machiavel. Unknown to Romelio, he is about to complicate his life with yet another conflict. He tells his mother, who has just entered, that her daughter is pregnant. Almost without comment on this somewhat startling piece of information, Leonora asks about Contarino's condition. Even Romelio is taken aback at her apparently indifferent attitude toward her own daughter. So he tells her that he has murdered Contarino. Romelio then, after some remarks about his sister's supposed looseness, leaves. Leonora, alone now, soliloquizes about her grief and suddenly again the audience is bedazzled by some of Webster's finest poetry. For forty-four lines (165-209) Leonora rehearses her grief and talks of revenge upon her son in lines of poetry which flash with brilliance. The remainder of this last scene of the third
act is not remarkable. A monk brings Eroole to Leonora who inadvertently tells them that Romelio supposedly murdered Contarino. Eroole's nobility is again stressed by his offer to marry Jolenta even after he has learned of her supposed pregnancy. Thinking that Contarino must be the father, he will save Jolenta's reputation by claiming the child as his own. After their departure, Leonora, contemplating how best to gain her revenge, calls for Winifred to bring the picture of one who forty years ago told her the picture would help her solve her problems. Looking at the picture (of Crispiano), Leonora concocts her own plot. She swears Winifred to secrecy and enlists her aid as the act closes.

By the close of Act III Webster has built up a series of complications which come to a major climax in Act IV and a somewhat lesser climax in Act V. The characters, motivated by avarice (Romelio), revenge (Leonora) and love (Contarino and Eroole), have woven a complicated fabric of plots and deceit; but the audience already knows that Romelio's plot is doomed to failure. The nature of Leonora's revenge upon her son is yet to be revealed. Finally, the sub-plot of Crispiano's investigation of his son remains, as yet, separate from the main action.

The first scene of Act IV prepares for the law case, for the courtroom scene. Sanitonella, having been told by Crispiano that Ariosto is an excellent lawyer (II, i), has taken Leonora to him to retain him to plead her case. What Sanitonella does not realize is that Ariosto is an honest lawyer. Sanitonella, a law clerk, has drawn up a brief of
Leonora's case. Ariosto does not even like the brief; it is too large. As Ariosto begins to become angry, the clerk says to him "...you are merry;" (15) through such a comment as this, Webster ironically emphasizes the non-tragic nature of his play.22 As Ariosto reads the document and learns the nature of Leonora's complaint, he becomes increasingly angry. Tearsing up the brief, he blasts Sanitonella as an upstart rogue and tells Leonora that she must be out of her mind to make such a claim, that she needs a doctor more than she needs a lawyer. These chorus-like speeches from the honest Ariosto sharpen the interest of the audience to know what exactly Leonora is charging. After Ariosto has angrily stormed out, another lawyer, Contilupo, enters. He is Leonora's man. Given money, he easily reads the rough draft of the brief and praises the beauty of Leonora's case. The appropriately named legal wolf assures his client that they cannot lose. But the audience still does not know what the case is; Webster has cleverly built up the suspense in this scene. He has also contrasted the honest lawyer who feels that "Bad Suits, and not the Law, bred the Lawes shame" (77) with the dishonest, avaricious attorney about whom Sanitonella remarks, "What money can doe!" (92) Finally, the audience sees the

22 Ariosto used exactly the same words to Romelio (II, iii, 30) when Romelio was trying his patience by asking about his being a cuckold. To this Romelio replied that he was angry. After Romelio has told Jolenta about his pregnant nun, Jolenta responds with a contemptuous remark. Romelio ironically replies, "I am glad you grow thus pleasant." (III, iii, 49).
dropping of one disguise: Ariosto no longer assumes the role of a patient man.

In Scene 11 of the act the disguises continue to drop and some of the conflicts begin to approach resolution. The scene opens with first Eroole, then Contarino, both still disguised, taking seats in the audience of the courtroom. With Contarino, who is disguised as a Dane, are his two doctors, who are also disguised because Romelio believes that they have gone to the Indies. Contarino has heard the rumor that Jolenta is pregnant by Eroole and has also heard that Romelio is already arranging a marriage for the still unborn infant with a noble house. Contarino refers to Romelio as a "subtill Devill." (23) Romelio himself has implied that he is a devil. When telling his sister of the supposed arrangement between Contarino and their mother, he had said, "Why, the malice scarce of Devils would suggest, /Incontinence 'tweene them two." (III, iii, 121-2) The Machiavel character is frequently referred to as a devil. The first part of the scene ends with a brief comic interlude between Sanitonella and Winifred. This bit of action not only functions as comic relief but also prolongs the suspense.

Then all of the other major characters, with the exception of Jolenta who does not appear in this scene, enter. Crispiano is the judge; Ariosto stands with Romelio though the merchant has not asked for his aid. Ariosto reminds Romelio of their previous meeting, the close of which foreshadowed this one. In doing so, he uses the same words that he had used before:

I have now occasion
Webster prepared for this turn of the plot as he prepared for Crispiano's being the judge. Romelio, not yet knowing of what he is accused, when he hears that his mother is his accuser, thinks that she has revealed his supposed murder of Contarino. Against the advice of Ariosto, who, of course, knows the charge, Romelio offers to have the case finally decided that day. In announcing his decision, Romelio assumes the rôle of innocent, shunning the advice of Ariosto as counsel. Ironically, he is innocent of what he is charged with, but his brave words, Ariosto thinks, will be of little avail. "Very fine words I assure you," Ariosto says, "if they were / To any purpose." (103-4) In this part of the scene, Ariosto is to Romelio almost as Bosola is to the Duchess during her final minutes of torment.

Contilupo, Leonora's attorney, then begins a long preliminary speech before coming to the actual accusation. Here, as elsewhere in the plays, Webster satirizes the verbosity and pomposity of lawyers. Contilupo hints at the charge in his opening statement, but Crispiano, vexed at his wordiness, tells him to come to the point. The point is that Leonora claims that her son is illegitimate. Her revenge is to be that Romelio, declared legally a bastard, will be

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23 Cf., II, iii, 79.
25 Cp. the opening of the trial scene in WD.
stripped of all his inheritance from his father. This stripping, coupled with his recent losses at sea, will leave him a pauper, a living, lingering death for him. Contilupo then gives all the details of the story that Leonora has invented. Crispiano, ever mistrusting of women, questions her about some of the details; but she has her story planned well and is not shaken. Even when Ariosto reminds her that her admitted adultery requires that she forfeit her own wealth, she remains firm in her revenge. (Sanitonella suddenly becomes worried, however, about how she will pay him.)

Romelio doesn't believe the charge and again has lines of invective which are good poetry. He says that the accusation

Has a most bloody unnaturall revenge
Hid under it: Oh the violencies of women!
Why, they are creatures made up and compounded
Of all monsters, poysoned Myneralls,
And sorcerous Herbes that growes. (325-9)

He continues his diatribe against women with. "Hard-hearted creatures, good for nothing else,/But to winde dead bodies." (336-7) Ariosto joins him in the anti-feminist statements, but then Romelio decides to resign himself to his condition; for it is, after all, his mother's sin, not his.

The unraveling of the deceptions begins when Crispiano asks the name of the man with whom Leonora claims to have committed adultery. Her answer is Don Crispiano. Julio is, of course, surprised to hear the name of his father as is Sanitonella to hear the name of his master. Neither knows that this is Crispiano on the bench. The audience, however, knows; therefore what follows is pure comedy to them. Crispiano, now sure that the case is false, asks for a witness.
to support Leonora's word. The witness is Winifred. Webster was clever in saving this comic character for a portion of the scene after the suspense has ended. Crispiano, in his questioning of the witness finds her a well-coached and apt liar. It is humorously ironic that her female vanity ultimately traps her. To Crispiano's question of her age, she responds forty-six. Inasmuch as Romello is thirty-eight, Crispiano points out, "You were a Bawd at eight yeare old: now verily,/ You fell to the Trade betimes." (439-40) Crispiano has been amusing himself (and the theater audience) by toying with Winifred, but as she tries to extricate herself from this pit, Crispiano ends the questioning. He sends for the picture of himself that Leonora had studied at the end of Act III, and steps down from the bench, announcing that he must retire as judge because he is implicated in the case and giving Ariosto the appointment to the judgeship. Sanitonella, still not recognizing his disguised master, is astounded. And the appointment of Ariosto, an honest man, confounds him. "We must then looke for all Conscience, and no Law," he says (503). When Crispiano doffs his disguise and identifies himself, revealing that he had not been in Europe but in the Indies since four years before the supposed adultery, the

26 Leonora has already said that she and Winifred had been together for forty years (III, iii, 418-9). The audience, therefore, knows that Winifred has ensnared herself.

27 Lucas questions whether Sanitonella had not recognized Crispiano at l. 362 when Crispiano's name was mentioned. But clearly Sanitonella (and Julio) had recognized only the name. (See Lucas, II, 356, n. 491.)
deception is ended. Defeated, Leonora will say no more than that Contarino was the cause of it all. (The disguised Contarino is astonished.) She begs leave to retire to a convent with her servant though not, it would appear, to take the veil herself.

The last part of the scene begins with Ercole revealing himself and accusing Romelio of Contarino's murder. Leonora, now discredited in the eyes of the court, is of no value in supporting Ercole's accusation; therefore Ariosto rules that the question must be settled by a duel between Ercole and Romelio. Contarino, still disguised, offers to stand with Ercole; Julio, hoping by a bold act to ingratiate himself with his angered father, volunteers to stand with Romelio. Ironically, Romelio now fears the carrying out of his plan; he asks that the court prevent his sister from entering a convent, fearing that she will give her property to one of the orders.

Finally, an attempt should be made to explain Contarino's behavior at the end of the fourth act. Why does he not put off his disguise to prevent the duel? Lucas suggests that the reason is "...gentlemanly preference of the duel to legal justice." Further, Contarino is confused by Leonora's statement about his being the cause of her seeking revenge although he is beginning to understand. And he wants to find out why Ercole, who would marry Jolenta even while thinking her pregnant by another man, would suddenly challenge her

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28 Lucas, II, 357, n. 598.
brother, who earlier had supported Ercole's suit to marry Jolenta.29

Act IV ends, then, with some of the disguises (Crispiano's and Ercole's) dropped. Leonora's attempt to establish appearance over reality has been thwarted. But the truth about Contarino is still unknown and the further complication of a duel between Romelio and Ercole has been added, both for holding the suspense through the last act and for the stage effect of another duel to please the audience.

The last act begins with a scene between Jolenta, absent from the stage since III, iii, and Angiolella, Romelio's pregnant nun. The function of the scene is to have the women plan an escape from the horrid situations both are in and to have Jolenta send a letter to Ercole, a letter which becomes important in the next scene. Finally, this scene gives the opportunity for some comments on virtue though Jolenta's comments on the pointlessness of a girl's retaining her chastity are about as convincing as Angiolella's comments on the need for a girl to be chaste. What is convincing, however, is the nun's unhappiness. She is indifferent to the sex of her unborn child; she is indifferent to the place that she and Jolenta go. Webster has done a remarkable job in economically creating the mood of complete despair in this character.

The second scene of the last act opens with another Websterian jab against lawyers, Prospero and Sanitonella being

29 See V, 11, 14-25.
the tools employed for this. The twelve lines of this sally have little enough to do with the action. When Ercole and Contarino, this time disguised as a monk, enter, the other two are dismissed. Contarino, in an aside, explains why he has not yet revealed himself in order to prevent the imminent duel. As pointed out above he has a question still to be resolved: why Ercole challenged Romello, the brother of the girl he loves and a man who supported his suit. Ercole's answer solves more of the problems of plot but creates another. First, he says, he challenged Romello to avenge the death of his friend, slain by Romello. Now he has even more reason; the letter sent him by Jolenta says that her shame "Was begot by her brother." (36) Whether this ambiguity in the letter was intentional or innocent it is impossible to tell. But both Ercole and Contarino naturally assume incest. Ercole has further motivation to kill Romello, and Contarino sees no reason to prevent Romello's death. Finally, this assumed incest cures Contarino of his love for Jolenta just as his supposed plans for incest cured Jolenta of her love for him. Now Jolenta has only one suitor, another step in the unraveling of the complications.

The place of the third scene changes again. The audience finds one of Contarino's doctors telling Winifred that most men make women dishonest, then marry them; but that he will marry Winifred if she will do an honest act to begin her reformation. He would have her disclose the news that Contarino is alive; they agree that she will tell the monk, the Capuchin who has appeared earlier in the play. The promise of marriage
evidently is a ruse, for no more is heard of it. In fact, Winifred does not appear in the play again. While Winifred is delivering the message to the monk, the surgeon will don Romelio’s old disguise of the Jew and by another ruse, apprehend Jolenta and Angioletta. The surgeon says that rumor has it that Jolenta is a little mad (small wonder, considering what she has been through) and that this false arrest might help to cure her. This possible madness also might account for the ambiguity of her letter to Ercole.

Scene iv again involves a change of place. The scene opens with Julio, Prospero and Sanitonella discussing the coming duel. The flippant Julio is frightened and regrets his hasty challenge of the disguised Contarino. Though Julio continues joking, his fear shows. The serious Prospero must give Julio a lecture on honor. When Romelio and the monk enter, Prospero and Sanitonella are dismissed. The Capuchin says in an aside that he will try to make Romelio penitent before telling him that Contarino is still alive. The dialogue between Romelio and the monk is built of some excellent poetry. Romelio, cynical and satiric as usual, tells the monk that he has no need for spiritual guidance. The exchange that follows is a good example of the lines that Webster has often given Romelio in the play:

Cap. Shall I pray for you?
Rom. Whether you doe or no, I care not.
Cap. O you have a dangerous voyage to take.
Rom. No matter, I will be mine owne Pilot:
Do not you trouble your head with the businesse.
(55-9)

Romelio, like other Webster heroes when death is close at hand, is stoic. He is prepared to fight and perhaps to die but on
his own terms. When the monk says that he wants only to make Romelio a good Christian, not a coward, Romelio replies,

Withall, let me continue
An honest man, which I am very certaine,
A coward can never be; (77-9)

Romelio will not now be hypocrite enough to turn to religion; such a turn would be cowardly. He makes it quite clear to the Capuchin that he does not fear death. Death, he says, makes a man safe from capricious fortune, a typical Websterian sentiment. When his mother enters with servants bearing two coffins and two shrouds, Romelio welcomes her and, to the accompaniment of what the stage direction calls "Soft Musicke," he recites a poem on the vanity of human wishes. There is a poetic streak in the Machiavellian merchant, a streak that Webster must have intended; for he gave Romelio most of the best poetry of the play. Romelio then, feigning penitence, tricks both his mother and the Capuchin into a closet in which he locks them. He has had enough of preaching; he must complete his preparations for the duel. With Julio, who is still full of bravado, he leaves. The scene ends with the trapped monk and Leonora searching for a way out of their tower. The monk comments on the irony of the situation:

...his obstinacy,
Madnesse, or secret fate, has thus prevented
The saving of his life. (206-8)

Leonora is worried only about Contarino's life and to save him urges the monk to try to attract the attention of a passerby.

The last scene of the play gives the audience a view of the spectacle of all ready to witness (or fight) a duel.
Romelio, having a second thought about prayer, sends to have the Capuchin and his mother released. Then the fighting begins and is "continued to a good length," says the stage direction. The lengthy fight would please the audience and would make credible the arrival of Leonora and the monk to end the combat. Contarino is revealed and says to Leonora, "And to you deare Lady, /I have entirely vowed my life." (29-30) Whether this is intended to mean that Contarino and Leonora will be married is not entirely clear. The actor would have to clarify the line by his actions. This begins the extraordinary denouement of the scene. Next Jolenta, disguised as a Moor, and Angiolella, veiled, are brought in by the two surgeons, one disguised as a Jew. It is ironic that Jolenta, the pure one of the two women, is black — the color of sin. Angiolella, described by one of the surgeons as "a white Nun" (37) is the sinful one. This final switch climaxes and sums up the theme of appearance versus reality in the play. The world of Webster is full of strange deceptions. When Jolenta speaks, Ercole recognizes her and claims her. Leonora gives Ariosto a letter explaining everything. And Ariosto ends the proceedings by passing sentence:

...now it does remaine,
That these so Comicall events be blasted
With no severitie of Sentence: (68-70)

All have been redeemed and apparently all have been made happy. Romelio must forgive Julio's interest on loans and he must marry Angiolella; furthermore he and Contarino must maintain ships against the Turks; Leonora, Jolenta and Angiolella must build a monestery; finally, the two surgeons must practice
their art at their own expense in the gallies for one year.

As Frederick S. Boas points out, the several years between the two great tragedies and The Devil's Law-Case brought some slipping in Webster's imagination; but this play has

...the evidences of other elements in Webster's genius and technique. His frequent economy in phrase, his masterful power in devising dramatic situations, his skill (till it fails at the close) in interlacing varied threads are all displayed.³⁰

The theme of appearance opposed to reality is again evident in this play, but there is here also a strong anti-feminist theme. Romelio is a character much like Flamino and Bosola of the tragedies — cynical, resourceful and self-possessed. Leonora, like Vittoria and the Duchess, defies the code of her society to gain what she has set her mind on; but unlike the heroines of the two tragedies, she lacks appeal because she descends to revenge and revenge on one of her own. The construction of the play is not unlike the construction of many other plays of this genre. Webster builds a series of events appropriate to tragedy; then, through a strange twist, the end of the events is not tragic. There are some minor inconsistencies in the plot, but the motivation grows out of the characterization and some of the characters, especially Romelio, are well drawn and compelling. It is a play rich in the ironies of Webster but, because of the contrived happy ending, lacking the gloomy world view of the earlier plays.

VI. THE COLLABORATIONS

Because of the way in which the collaborators worked during Webster's time, it is difficult to say anything conclusive about the dramaturgy of a single poet in a play that is a result of a collaboration. Una Ellis-Fermor considers it a law of Jacobean drama that a collaboration is not the sum of the qualities of the collaborators but an entirely different product. Apparently a frequent method of the dramatists was to discuss a plot, to assign various scenes and acts, then to work independently. This method of writing was quite suitable for creating a play in which individual scenes were more important than a unified whole. As a consequence when they assembled their individual efforts, they often had a play that looked like a literary camel. But as the camel is a serviceable beast in its own milieu, so was the collaboration in its; it was another vehicle for a theater hungry for new plays.

There is no consensus among scholars on the problem of authorship in the collaborations in which Webster was apparently one of the writers. Lucas does not include Sir Thomas Wyatt, Westward Ho!, or Northward Ho! in the standard edition of Webster's works. Fredson Bowers does include these three in his edition of the works of Dekker. Ian Scott-Kilvert writes

1 Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, p. xi.

2 Of the early collaboration with Dekker, Ian Scott-Kilvert says, "Webster's contribution to the comedies written with Dekker is hardly distinguishable from his collaborator's." John Webster (London, 1964), p. 16.
that "Recent research by Professor R. G. Howarth claims several new attributions for Webster, notably A Speedy Post (1624), The Valiant Scott (1637) and several more Overturian Characters." The present writer, however, has been unable to locate in the bibliographies any reference to Howarth's findings. Perhaps the two titles given by Scott-Kilvert refer to two more Characters. Lucas includes four collaborations in the collected works of Webster: A Cure For a Cuckold, Appius and Virginia, The Fair Maid of the Inn and Anything for a Quiet Life. Of these four, the first two are run-of-the-mill efforts, the latter two considerably less. A Cure For a Cuckold will serve as an example of the problem of trying to discuss Webster's dramaturgy in a play in which he was only one of several collaborators.

The consensus of scholarship dates A Cure For a Cuckold from about 1625 though the play did not appear in print till 1661. Gray assigns to Webster three scenes - III, i; IV, ii; and V, 1b. He thinks it possible that this was a play by Rowley and Heywood, revised by Webster. Lucas assigns the same three scenes to Webster and sees Webster's hand in parts of six others - I, i; II, iv; III, iii; IV, i; V, i; and V, i.e. Judging on the basis of imagery, the function of imagery and rhythm, Ekeblad arrives at the same conclusion

3 Ibid., p. 12.
5 Lucas, III, 10-18.
as Gray and Lucas: three scenes seem to be the work of Webster alone.6

Brooke says of the play,

It is almost entirely unimportant for throwing light on the real Webster. All we know is that he had something to do with the play; how much or how little it is impossible to tell from reading it.7

There are, however, some Websterian touches in the play, and two of the three scenes attributed to Webster, the duel scene (III, i) and the scene between Clare and Lessingham, then Clare and Bonvile (IV, ii), are among the best in the play. The scene of the duel between Lessingham and Bonvile is Websterian, Lucas points out, in its many parallels of speeches with other Webster works and in its general resemblance to the duel scene in The Devil's Law-Case.8 This parallel of the gentlemanly duelists who have long been good friends is rather striking.

There is a second sort of Webster parallel that has not before been noted, however. It is seen somewhat in Lessingham and even better in Clare. This is the similarity in characterization. Lessingham is somewhat in the line of descent from Flamineo, Bosola and Romelio. He first appears with Clare in I, i, a lover pleading with his mistress for her to accept him. It is in this scene, assigned to Webster and Heywood, that the inciting force of the action occurs. Clare

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6 Inga-Stina Ekeblad, "Webster's Constructional Rhythm," ELH, XXIV (1957), 165-76.
7 Brooke, p. 121.
8 Lucas, III, 15.
tells Lessingham that he can win her favor only by killing his best friend. This message is given to Lessingham in a note, the wording of which is equivocal. The equivocation of the note, on which rests the motivation of the main plot, turns out to be a matter again of appearance as opposed to reality. The note reads

Prove all thy friends, find out the best and nearest,  
kill for my sake that friend that loves thee dearest.  
(118-9)

Lessingham again reads the note so that the audience will be sure to understand it in lines 122-3. Although the themes of love versus friendship and of the test of love and friendship as used here are quite old, the audience is to assume that a man of honor will not kill his best friend for the whim of a woman. Lessingham, however, a man whose actions are entirely motivated by selfish interests, proceeds to fulfill Clare's demand. In I, ii, another scene given to Webster and Heywood, he goes about proving his friends, each of whom first professes to esteem Lessingham highly, then, after finding out that he must fight a duel for his friend, finds a convenient excuse. The only one who proves true to his professed friendship is Bonvile, who agrees to go even though it is his wedding day. In the duel scene Lessingham is perfectly willing to try to kill his friend, but the duel is not fought when Bonvile says that Lessingham's base actions

9 Lucas frequently points out Webster's fondness for equivocations. See, for example, III, 22.

have killed their friendship which is tantamount to killing a friend. Finally, when Lessingham discovers that Clare loves Bonvile, he attempts to ruin the unconsummated marriage of Bonvile and Annabel by making each believe that the other has been unfaithful. Lessingham is not the Machiavel type of the earlier plays, but his plotting and his deceptions, his attempts at the end to create an illusion to supplant reality, are rather like the actions of the other Webster characters. And Lessingham's attempts at deception in the last act are in parts of the act attributed to Webster.

Though Lessingham is somewhat like earlier Webster characters, Clare is even more like Webster's other women characters. Here again is the willfull, dominant woman -- related to the Duchess and Vittoria and Leonora. The ultimate source of the story of Clare, and of the main plot, is again one of the novelle of Bandello through Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*. But this story had been dramatized by Marston as *The Dutch Courtezan* about 1603 and again by Massinger as *The Parliament of Love*, which was licensed for performance on 3 November 1624. Lucas agrees with Stoll and Brooke that the Massinger play was probably copied by Webster and his colleagues.11 At any rate, the source presented the type of female character with whom Webster had successfully worked before. Clare appears in five scenes of the play, in all of which scenes Webster is thought to have had some part in the writing. Her biggest scene is IV, ii, a scene attributed

entirely to Webster. One of the major difficulties of the play is that Clare’s motivation is not clear. The difficulty is this: after giving Lessingham the cryptic note, Clare realizes that Lessingham intends, for her sake, to kill Bonvile. She first begins to think that Lessingham means to kill Bonvile in II, iv, and she says in an aside, "Lessingham’s mistaken, quite out o’th way of my purpose too." (36-7) Inasmuch as this is said in an aside, the audience must be intended to believe that Lessingham has misconstrued her note, that the appearance of the note was intended to conceal its real meaning. Again in III, iii, when it has become even more clear that Bonvile and Lessingham have gone to Calais to fight, Clare says, again in an aside,

Oh fool Lessingham,  
Thou hast mistook my injunction utterly,  
Utterly mistook it, and I am mad, stark mad  
With my own thoughts, not knowing what event  
Their going o’re will come to; ’tis too late  
Now for my tongue to cry my heart mercy,  
Would I could be senseless till I hear  
Of their return: I fear me both are lost. (13-20)

Again, then, she says to the audience that it was not her intent for Lessingham to slay Bonvile. In her scene with Lessingham (IV, ii), she purports to explain to Lessingham what she really meant. She says of her cryptic note,

...I did love that Bonvile,  
(Not as I ought, but as a woman might  
That’s beyond reason,) I did doat upon him,  
Though he ne’er knew of it, and beholding him  
Before my face wedded unto another,  
And all my interest in him forfeited,  
I fell into despair, and at that instant  
You urging your suit to me, and I thinking  
That I had been your only friend i’t world,  
I heartily did wish you would have kill’d  
That friend yourself, to have ended all my sorrow,  
And had prepared it, that unwittingly  
You should have don’t by poison. (68-80)  

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But later in the same scene Clare apparently admits to Bonville that she did intend for Lessingham to kill him. Bonville has told Clare that Lessingham has followed the instructions of her letter and returns to her the note she had given Lessingham. She, in turn, gives Bonville a note which she says that she intended that he receive an hour before his marriage. He reads the note and says,

Strange! this expresses
That you did love me.
Clare. With a violent affection
Bon. Violent indeed; for it seems it was your purpose
To have ended in violence on your friend:
The unfortunate Lessingham unwittingly
Should have been the executioner.
Clare. 'Tis true.12 (161-8)

This reading, then, seems to contradict everything that Clare has said before. "Friend" in line 165 must refer to Bonville. Brooke and Lucas think, however, that such a reading makes the plot incoherent. Brooke suggests, therefore, that line 165 be emended to read "To have ended in violence: and your friend," a reading that would make sense of the motivation.13 This emendation, then, would change the sense of the passage to make it concordant with the rest of the plot: her friend Lessingham would be the unwitting tool for her death. Lucas somewhat half-heartedly accepts Brooke's suggestion.14 Leech simply suggests that many of the confusions of the later plays

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12 This passage is quoted from Alexander Dyce, ed., The Works of John Webster (London, 1871), p. 310. Dyce is here following the 1661 Quarto.
14 Lucas, III, 117.
could be the result of collaboration. However, there is also another possibility: that of accepting the Quarto reading with the following explanation. The theme of false appearances has always been a dominant one in the other plays. The falsity of women has been particularly stressed. Clare tells Lessingham that even after her near madness at the loss of Bonvile and after her supposed abortive attempt to have Lessingham poison her ends in Bonvile's risking death, she still loves Bonvile "Almost to a degree of madness." (94) Lessingham says in an aside

Trust a woman!
Never henceforward, I will rather trust
The winds which Lapland Witches sell to men --
All that they have is feign'd, their teeth, their hair,
Their blushes, nay their conscience too is feigned,
Let 'em paint, load themselves with Cloth of Tissue,
They cannot yet hide woman -- that will appear
And disgrace all. (95-102)

This is typically a Websterian speech, quite like some made by Bosola. And it reminds the audience that Clare always wants to appear that which she is not; she tries to obscure her motives. Only a man in love could have accepted, as did Lessingham accept, her statement that her note meant that he was to kill her. Lessingham has had no reason to believe that she is his friend. In the first scene of the play, in some of the best lines in a play that can claim only a few good passages, Lessingham has said to her,

I have loved you
Beyond my self, mis-spended for your sake
Many a fair hour, which might have been imployed
To pleasure, or to profit, have neglected

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15 Leech, John Webster, pp. 90-8.
Duty to them from whom my being came,  
My parents; but my hopeful studies most.  
I have stol'n time from all my choice delights,  
And robb'd myself, thinking to enrich you.  
Matches I have had offered, some have told me,  
As fair, as rich -- I never thought 'em so,  
And lost all these in hope to finde out you,  
Resolve me then for Christian charity,  
Think you an Answer of that frozen nature  
Is a sufficient satisfaction for  
So many more then needful services? (35-49)

Clare could not seriously have thought that he would have assumed that she was his friend. Her explanation to Bonvile, then, is patently false. Hence Brooke's emendation isn't necessary. However, Clare could not have intended that Lessingham kill Bonvile, for her asides indicate that she had no such intent and the convention of the aside requires that the speaker tell the truth. And if Clare has some way of knowing that Bonvile is Lessingham's best friend, the one Lessingham will kill, the audience doesn't know it. Perhaps, as Lessingham imagines (III, i, 90-93), she wishes simply to be rid of him. This view of her motivation would also explain Bonvile's comment. The line "To have ended in violence on your friend" could mean, then, that she hoped Lessingham would be killed, or if not, that he would be prosecuted for killing another. However, all this is pure conjecture for two reasons. First, Clare has been characterized as a false woman; hence there is no reason to accept as true what she says to Bonvile or has written to Bonvile. Second, the audience is never told what is in the letter to Bonvile that he reads in IV, i; therefore the audience cannot be sure on what he is commenting.

The Websterian theme of appearance versus reality is,
however, strong in the play, especially in the scenes attributed to Webster. Clare is false; Lessingham gives her a false report of Bonvile's death, and Bonvile toys with illusion in his equivocation that Lessingham's killing their friendship is tantamount to Lessingham's killing him. These parts of the play are apparently Webster's. But even in the sub-plot, which is largely Rowley's, there is this theme. Compass wishes to prove that the child that Franckford sired upon Compass' wife during Compass' four-year absence is his own.

Finally another puzzle concerning the sub-plot: why is the title of the play drawn from it? And why does Kirkman, the publisher of the first edition in 1661, dwell on the sub-plot to the exclusion of all else in the play in his preface, "The Stationer, to the Judicious Reader"? Could Kirkman be attempting some sort of illusion of his own to make the play a better seller in a period in which theater performances had just recommenced and there were as yet few new plays? The answers are beyond the scope of this paper and, perhaps, beyond the scope of scholarship. As Lucas says,

There are Elizabethan scholars -- too many of them -- to whom even a tinge of uncertainty apparently seems indecent; but one may be allowed to wonder if those who are unable for a moment to suspend their judgment, have any to suspend.  

Appius and Virginia, dating from about the same year as A Cure For a Cuckold (1625), also presents some characters

16 Lucas, III, 145.
17 For the difficulties in dating this play, see Lucas, III, 123-30.
and a situation that could be said to be Websterian. There
is, however, less agreement among scholars upon the authorship
of this play than upon the authorship of A Cure For A Cuckold.
Rupert Brooke, for example, does not see the hand of Webster
in the play at all; he attributes it entirely to Heywood.\(^\text{18}\)
Gray\(^\text{19}\) and Haworth\(^\text{20}\) generally agree with Brooke’s view. Lucas,
on the other hand, attributes about half of the play to Webster.\(^\text{21}\)
The view held by Lucas is supported by others, Seiden\(^\text{22}\) and
Ekeblad,\(^\text{23}\) for example. Howarth, however, attributes almost
the entire play to Webster.\(^\text{24}\) As for the Websterian touches
of the play, Appius’ duplicity in feigning a possible refusal
of the office and false nature of the character throughout
the play -- appearing good while acting evil -- are like
Webster. But this whole idea is drawn from the source.\(^\text{25}\)
Stoll finds the character of Appius Machiavellian and compares
him to Romelio.\(^\text{26}\) A production of the play, however, might

\(^\text{19}\) Henry David Gray, "Appius and Virginia: by Webster and
\(^\text{21}\) Lucas, III, 134-45.
\(^\text{22}\) Melvin Seiden, "Two Notes on Webster's Appius and Vir-
\(^\text{23}\) Inga-Stina Ekeblad, "Storm Imagery in 'Appius and Vir-
ginia,'" *Notes and Queries*, CCI (1956), 5-7.
\(^\text{24}\) R. G. Howarth, "Webster's Appius and Virginia," *Philo-
\(^\text{25}\) Lucas, III, 131-3.
\(^\text{26}\) Stoll, pp. 200-5.
reveal Marcus Claudius to be more the cunning plotter, the Machiavel; and there seems to be a relationship between him and some earlier Webster characters. Finally, there are the Advocate, also a dissembler, and the trial scene, both Websterian touches. But the evil of Appius is not like that of the other villains; the atmosphere of the play is unlike that of the great tragedies, and the poetic flashes are lacking.

Thus it is with the collaborations. Little can be said of the dramaturgy of one of the collaborators. Most criticisms of the plays come back to proving authorship, to assigning parts of the plays to the various dramatists. And such ineffective plays as Anything for a Quiet Life and The Fair Maid of the Inn could show even less about Webster’s dramaturgy than do the other two.
In order to judge a play of the Renaissance, the critic must understand what the dramatist was attempting. The plays of Webster and of his contemporaries cannot be judged by the standards of modern realistic drama. Attempting to judge by the standards of their own times and by the conventions of their own theaters is the mistake of many of Webster's defamers. But even those who have been more favorably disposed to Webster's works often have not given the plays close enough scrutiny. Therefore in this study I have tried to point out some of the conventions, some of the ways of characterization and some of the methods of development of a play in the Renaissance theater. With these things in mind, I have examined closely each of the three plays that Webster wrote alone in order to try to see what kind of dramatic craftsman Webster was.

There are certain types of characters in all of the plays. And there are certain themes to which Webster returned in each play, examining them from different points of view but finally saying much the same thing about these themes in each play. The dramaturgy in each play is, for the most part, typical of the plays of the period. Like his fellow playwrights, Webster apparently stressed the scene rather than the whole action; there is, however, an organic unity of action. But the facts that the Renaissance audience wanted to see memorable scenes, and the dramatists willingly would sacrifice the whole to the scene, are of paramount importance in a
consideration of the plays of this period.

In *The White Devil* Webster presents an amazing gallery of evil characters, evil but fascinating. Vittoria, chief among them, is a woman of undeniable attractiveness but of entirely self-seeking intent. She is able to manage Brachiano in love and her accusers, Monticelso and Francisco, in her trial. She is a consistent character, not deviating from the pattern of amorality in which she is first presented. Her implanting in Brachiano's mind the idea of the murders of their spouses, her handling of her accusers during her trial, her turning of Brachiano's accusation of infidelity to her own advantage, her stoic death at the hands of the assassins -- these are the big scenes of the play, the scenes dominated by the lovely but ruinous Vittoria. Her guilt seems almost innocent in her defiance of powerful foes; therefore her death is tragic. She is the White Devil, beautiful on the outside but corrupting within -- a devil in disguise, leading to hell those who will follow. Overshadowed by this protagonist is Flamineo, the aspiring Machiavel. In some ways Flamineo is like his sister; he too is lacking a moral code. Flamineo is a schemer and an arranger -- an able procurer and assassin. But he is not the complete Machiavel that Francisco is; Flamineo lacks the Duke's experience and power, hence is the loser in the battle. But as a malcontent, Flamineo can serve the important function of choral commentator. Much of the action is interpreted by him; he emphasizes the corruption of the courts, of the society in the play. This corruption as seen in the idea of appearance versus reality is the central theme of the play. The antagonists and the other

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characters, though less fully presented than Vittoria and Flamineo, are functional and consistent; and they further reinforce the central theme both in characterization and in action. The plot of the play follows the usual pyramidal structure of Renaissance tragedy. Though some of the protagonist's scenes are more important and better done than other scenes, there is nothing in the play that is non-functional.

The Duchess of Malfi continues the theme of appearance and reality in a corrupt world, but the character of the protagonist has been somewhat altered. It is as if Webster has shown the audience an evil woman abroad in a corrupt world; now he is to create a good woman in the same environment. The Duchess is not altogether innocent in Renaissance eyes, but she is certainly not the egoist that Vittoria is. Both are strong women; both are willful; the Duchess, however, does not initiate actions which obviously will ruin others. The protagonist of this play also has some scenes which overshadow others in the play: the marriage scene; the scene between the Duchess and her brother, played in the dark; the scene of the tormenting and death of the Duchess are examples. Bosola in this play is the extension of Flamineo in the first play, but Bosola is not overshadowed by the main character as is Flamineo. Bosola is also the Machiavel-malocontent character and is also a commentator on the actions and on the other characters. By his comments, he illuminates the dark evil of the play. The construction of the play, often criticized for the supposedly superfluous last act, is again the pyramidal structure with a somewhat
longer period of falling action and denouement than in most
other plays of this pattern.

The tragi-comedy The Devil's Law-Case follows a plot
course quite similar to that of the two revenge tragedies;
but after the turning point of the play the action moves from
a tragic to a non-tragic outcome. There are also similarities
between the characters of this play and those of the tragedies.
Romelio is a schemer after the fashion of Flamineo and Bosola
but lacking their total dedication to evil. Leonora is as
willful as the protagonists of the two tragedies and as strong
as well. The theme of illusion is also central to this play;
and, although the outcome of the play is not tragic, Webster's
world view is not much altered. The corruption and duplicity
of this play are on a different scale from the corruption and
duplicity of the tragedies. Here Webster is dealing with the
bourgeoisie rather than with courts; the corruption, there­
fore, is on less grand a scale. But given the corrupt and
devious natures of the characters, one could hardly call the
outcome of the play happy. By and large, these people seem
to deserve each other; the view is still pessimistic.

John Webster was a poet and dramatic artist of his
times. His plays are constructed in the pattern common to
his period. To many, his gloomy view of the world, the
horrors of the plays and the evil of the characters are
repellent. But the characters have life; the horrors reflect
the violence of the times; and a writer, certainly, is entitled
to his own weltanschauung, be it pessimistic or not. Webster's
world is filled with evil and gloom, but that is the world
as he saw and presented it. It is a world in which good and evil are relative values. Although the antagonists in both plays are, perhaps, embodiments of evil, no character is entirely innocent (at least no adult character). There is no total embodiment of good in the plays -- not Cornelia, Marcello nor Isabella in The White Devil; neither the Duchess nor Antonio in The Duchess of Malfi. Although the Duchess is a sympathetic character, she has violated order by marrying beneath her station, and she has married without the consent of her brothers. Surely what she suffers is far beyond the measure of punishment that might be expected for her folly, folly that is very slight in the eyes of a modern audience but which would be better recognized by Webster's audience. Webster seems to be saying that living in a corrupt world corrupts the individual, regardless of the basic good nature of a person. There is love in this world, certainly; but love in Webster's world is not purifying. The lovers in The Duchess of Malfi are good but not innocent; they are human beings with faults. The world of Webster's plays is a world in which evil is predominant, a world of sin and gloom. The scenes of joy and purity stand out like explosive lightning flashes in a sky of black velvet. And lightning they are, for they prefigure a storm that is to come. To object to this somber world view is vain. To seek a moral purpose in the Jacobean dramatist Webster is a futile exercise. The world that he depicts in The White Devil is a world in which evil faces evil; the triumph of the unsympathetic evil is no strain on the moral sense of the audience. In The Duchess of Malfi
the good and evil together succumb to the power of malignant Fate. In neither play is there any indication that the world has been righted, that justice will now prevail, that the evil has been purged, although the end of The Duchess of Malfi holds out a faint ray of hope. In The Devil's Law-Case the play ends in a stalemate with people to whom attach varying degrees of opprobrium being equally paired. One should turn to Webster for well constructed plays, memorable characters and flashes of brilliant poetry. And surely these positive aspects are enough to expect from a playwright.
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EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

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Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: John Webster's Dramaturgy

Approved:

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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